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THE HOUSE ON CHARLES STREET



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THE HOUSE ON CHARLES STREET

E Burr, Anna Robeson (Brown)



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Book I
THE END OF THE BEGINNING

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CHAPTER I

MOST of us who had read our lives by the dying sunset of the nineteenth century, probably accepted the generalizations that after evolution comes dissolution, and after intellectual advance there is bound to be emotional reaction. But none of us expected to witness this dissolution, or to experience this reaction. Crises have a way of diffusing themselves so that they are only recognized after they are passed; and few societies in the world's history have had self-consciousness enough to realize the significance of what befell them. Once or twice, however, in human affairs, it has been otherwise: and mankind has undergone an unforgettable crisis in beholding—with complete realization of what it means—the portentous operation of Natural Law. In this vast convulsion all human atoms are affected, many are engulfed, many shaken from the place where they had clung like limpets to the rock, to be whirled about, hither and yon by the upheaval, never knowing when or where they shall be stayed.

Sometimes the expected happens. In this beautiful high valley there was only one sign of it, only one visible token that this day was not as other days. It was a Sunday afternoon in midsummer, clear and hot. After weeks of icy showers, the weather had settled and only a few wisps of vapour clung to the heights, above which there hung the dazzling whiteness, the immutable frozen cloud of Mont Blanc. The blue of the sky above that again was the blue of the high Alpine passes. There was no wind. A regiment of pines stood motionless, in rows, and seemed to look over each others' shoulders down

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into the valley beneath, where two broad highroads run, a strip of meadow-land between, lying like a green carpet on each edge of the stream. The mountain wall on either hand takes its magnificence from abruptness; it rises at a definite angle like the wall of a house. Overhead hang the great glaciers—imminent and terrifying, cataracts suspended at a frozen breath, grey curtains of ice. When the valley was full of cheerful noises, feet clattering, cow-bells jangling, life moving on full current, busy and gay, one hardly noticed them; to-day they brooded like a curse over the valley, sinister presences, which repeated exorcism with bell, book, and candle, had not dispelled.

There was one token that this day was not as other days, and that was its complete, strange silence. Had it been England, one would put it down to Sunday—but France holds the Sabbath as a day of picnics and expeditions, a day of music and of merry voices. On this Sunday the highbroad was unmarked by a vehicle, no one walked in the fields, or climbed upon the cliffs, or stood knitting at the cottage doorways. The voice of the Arveyron, swollen by recent rains, roared along its bed. Even the cattle on the high pastures remained silent, not even shaking their great bells.

On that stretch of which runs from Argentières to Chamonix, two moving dots made their appearance, raising, as they advanced, a little cloud of white dust to hang in the motionless air. As they drew slowly nearer—the only living things in that apparently empty landscape—they were seen to be the figures of two young women, each of whom carried a suitcase, overcoat, and umbrella, while in addition they carried a third bag between them. Burdened thus heavily, their progress could not be rapid, but it was steady and determined and made

evident that their goal was the railroad station. The stillness everywhere, with all its sinister quality, had exerted its influence upon them, and they spoke rarely together. Words seemed for the moment to be quite useless; and all that torrent of anxiety, fear, and conjecture which had possessed them during the past few days, had ceased to flow. One of them, if she had felt like talking at all, would have simply given vent to the reiterated amazement, and repeated stupefied questioning of a person quite ignorant of the causes of anything. To herself she seemed to be the spectator of an universal madness, which must pass; or the dreamer of a dream too hateful and too vivid to last. The other who was the more sensitive and the more imaginative—was sunk in a different kind of silence; the silence of a person who is conscious of certain stirrings in her own soul—movements which, while new, are yet very old—cares and fears dimly held and, as it were, remembered. These had as yet no vocabulary, but one was forming fast, the faster that the state to be expressed was not a novel one—but one already familiar.

They had reached the outskirts of the little town without encountering a single human being. During all that walk the voice of the Arveyron, angry as it seemed and threatening, had been the only clear sound. Now they became aware of another sound that mingled with it, sometimes afar off and stifled, sometimes nearer as if just around the corner, but ever the same thin, desperate sound, that of women weeping. By a common impulse the two set down the bag they carried, and turned to each other.

“Crying!” said the elder in a subdued voice, “Crying: all of them! It is true then . . . and last week they were all so happy!”

The two girls Elizabeth and Sydney, whose holi-

day in Savoy had been so strangely cut short, possessed one great advantage over three hundred and fifty thousand American tourists all undergoing at that moment similar experiences. They were far from rich; the trip had been a great event, carefully planned for, and it had involved travelling light. Therefore, at that same hour when the three hundred and fifty thousand were frantically packing their trunks or filling the telegraph offices with piles of never-to-be-sent messages, these two were already at the railway station, already at the "guichet,"—already in the train. Inexperience also having made them nervous, the first rumour of the money panic had sent them flying to the bank. "*C'est une panique épouvantable!*" said the grey-haired little banker at Chamonix; but he paid the modest sum they asked in good silver and gold. Poor, anxious Madame Du-clos of the pension had promised to forward the trunk to Geneva when things should be easier—they had been *très sympathique*, and it was always well to oblige Americans. As the train moved away down the Valley, leaving the pines, the great glaciers, the empty roads, and the noisy Arveyron—her face rose up before one of the two girls, that fat, silly face, all smeared with tears and marked with suffering. "Oh, Mademoiselle!" she had wailed—"Et mon mari, qui à dû partir ce matin!" and again the younger woman had been aware, in the very heart of all this stupefying sorrow—that it was not new, not new, even to her.

The valley wound and unwound its green, sunshiny stillness, broadened and turned, so that the two were able to look back for one long, satisfying moment on the vast bulk of Mont Blanc, buttressed with snow, spanning the world, looming over it with an aloof magnificence which was somehow or other, comforting. One of our travellers at least felt it

so; the other was too much occupied with her own perplexities, beating vainly against movements which did not seem to have taken account of her at all!

If the country around seemed silent, this could no longer be said of the stations or of the train. It became very crowded with an animated and polyglot crowd, to whose voices panic had lent an additional shrillness. Our travelers had a small stock of American-French, but not enough to help them understand the rumours which flew about those crowds or the remarks that were shouted significantly from one to another. It was not without a dim apprehension, however, that they noticed the bulk of the travelers to be men, grey-faced for the most part and not at all young; while the women with children clinging around them had come only to see them depart. The two American girls had kept up between them a certain pretence of indifference and a constant repetition of the idea that these matters did not affect their affairs; and this pretence had been a comfort and a stay hitherto. But with each passing station, with each larger and more anxious crowd, each successive group of weeping women, their own disquiet grew and grew. As the train neared Geneva, men in uniform began to dominate the crowd; with here and there groups of boys gathered together in attitudes of utter fear and misery and with even more sickening evidences of a sudden and overwhelming terror.

On the frontier, the train made a long stop, and all the travellers crowded to the windows. Annemasse station presented a spectacle sufficiently alarming. Irritated authorities, both French and Swiss, whose nerves had been stretched to breaking-point, strove to cope with clamouring travellers of every nationality, all moved by one herd impulse which stampeded them to their homes. The mobilization

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of the Swiss on their frontiers, added to the confusion every available man who might have been otherwise called upon to control it. Voices of newsboys brandishing the "Journal de Genève"—only four sinister paragraphs on one sheet—of children screaming—and of men heatedly disputing, rose from the platform.

A heavy train rolled into position and stopped. Sydney watching from the window noticed that it was in every way finer than the one she was in, with carriages well upholstered, and a dining-car filled in every seat. Along the tops of the carriages were the names of German cities. A large fat man with a napkin tucked under his chin, leaned out of the window of the restaurant car and looked up and down the platform. At the sight of his spectacles and red, pendulous cheeks, a group of scarlet-trousered soldiers nearby made a rush to the window with a snarling cry having in it a note of fury. The German's face disappeared as by magic; an official rushed up and hustled the soldiers away. But our travellers looked at one another with darkening eyes and a touch of pallor. It was their first glimpse of the passions which underlay all this confusion, of the forces which were to move life to new ends, and to turn the countenance of the world into the face of a stranger. They returned to their seats in a sort of stupor. The train once more moved on.

CHAPTER II

M. PAYOT, the kind little banker at Chamonix, had given good advice with the gold pieces he had handed over three days before. "*De l'or, Mademoiselle,*" he had said significantly, "*Voyez-vous, c'est toujours de l'or!*" And the recipient, although she had scoffed at the time, recalling the sacred green paper of her native land, had cause to bless M. Payot. For it was only the sight of those gold pieces, payable in advance, which procured our tired travellers a decent lodging that night in Geneva. They had already chosen their pension—and sent a telegram. It would undoubtedly be a little costlier than they had expected at this stage in the trip, but then Elizabeth had settled the whole matter with the shrewd good sense which had already saved them more than they knew. It was Elizabeth who had insisted on their leaving Argentières at once for Geneva; and now it was Elizabeth who grasped fully that, so far as pleasure went, the trip was at an end.

"Even if they fix it up between them now," she had argued with a knowledge of effects, if a lamentable ignorance of causes, "everything and everybody will be demoralized for months. No, my dear, home is the place for us, whatever happens. The U. S. A. is good enough for me—I've had enough of foreign travel! We'll just go home as quickly as we can get there."

"Perhaps that's easier said than done," replied her companion, with a doubt born of a more far-reaching imagination. "Suppose they begin to fight?"

"Well, suppose they do?" Elizabeth scornfully

retorted. "There is always at least a month allowed for non-combatants to get out of the way, isn't there? And nobody fights against women that I've heard of!"

Poor Elizabeth! There came a time when she might have laughed at herself for thinking that the warring countries of Europe were going to wait, like armies on the stage, until all the American tourists had collected their belongings, paid their bills, and betaken themselves comfortably homeward. But this fiction was not peculiar to Elizabeth and it saved a lot of panic.

"Lucky for us that we've got our passage and paid for it," she pursued. "It's the getting to England that's going to be expensive. It'll be worth everything to us to be among nice people; perhaps they'll know more what to do."

The telegram—when they reached the pleasant little hotel—had, needless to say, failed to arrive. Even if it had, the proprietress hastened to assure them with a note of scorn in her voice—, her rooms were already filled. But Elizabeth was not to be balked; she was pleasant; she was firm; she was not, apparently, in the least bit of a panic; and she laid the gold for the first week carelessly on the table. Certainly, she was not in the same category as those exhausted, hysterical, nasal-toned persons who filled the pension's best rooms and announced themselves destitute. So the proprietress reflected and the gold did the rest.

"We're awfully lucky!" declared Elizabeth, as she surveyed the fourth cab-full of disconsolate travellers drive away from the door. "We need only stay quietly here a few days and then go right on, when we're rested!" Thus serene in their appalling ignorance, the pair dined with youthful enjoyment, and slept well, notwithstanding the glare of electric

lights which beat unmercifully up from the margin of the lake.

Weeping . . . the sound of women weeping in the dawn . . . and marching feet, ever more marching feet. . . . These were the memories of Geneva, which the younger girl carried thereafter in her heart. The skies were clear and steadily blue. It was hot and people streamed restlessly to and fro—because they were caught and couldn't get away; because they couldn't get home. From this restless sea waves of terror rose and beat and beat. No one knew what was happening; no one knew anything. First telegrams stopped and then trains ceased to run. Were the Germans bombarding Basle? No, it was the French who were crossing to attack Alsace. Rumours rose and ebbed; no one knew whence or how.

The English fleet had attacked Hamburg and burned it . . . All the banks in America had failed in one tremendous crash. The United States Senate had passed a vote of sympathy with the German Government. This *was* a strange thing to happen, but with so many stranger things happening no one thought enough to deny it. . . . And all the while no money.

The bank failure story really worried Elizabeth. She had gone early to Cook's on Monday morning and had stood in line behind a fussy gentleman from Milwaukee, who protested at receiving nothing smaller than fifty franc notes. Elizabeth's considerate manner and quieter voice moved the unfortunate paying-teller to express himself. "Him and his small change!" he cried, "Why, compared to what it is going to be—this is *perfume!*!" And Elizabeth found that he was right. The next day and many a day after there was no use in going to Cook's—or to any other bank. Elizabeth and her compan-

ion were well provided for the present—but suppose that it were to last? With a curious gregariousness, which grew with panic and perplexity, the two girls joined the restless crowds, while a pause of inaction settled upon their days. In the morning they paid a visit to the bank and a visit to the consulate. Sometimes a stroll followed to divert their minds in the older quarter of the town, and, as the heat of day declined, that endless procession of nationalities across the Pont des Alpes drew them irresistibly to the consideration of their fellow-prisoners.

On a certain bench in the shade, not far from where the black and white swans gathered to be fed, Elizabeth and Sydney sat day after day as at a show. It was a long bench and by the third or fourth occupation, the girls became aware that another person had formed the same habit—a slight, elderly woman with blonde-grey hair, large, mild, blue eyes, cut steel earrings, long and dangling, and several lengths of gold chain wrapped, by way of ornament, about her neck. She wore each day the same dress of black silk, quaintly puffed, which reminded Sydney of certain of Du Maurier's drawings, especially in the way the feather of her little hat drooped down over her hair. Acquaintances are readily made under such circumstances, but it was characteristic of both parties that nearly a week passed before they exchanged more than a greeting. The stranger, while realizing at once the nationality of the two girls, was yet struck by something cool and untouched in their attitude—for their independence and self-sufficiency had not brought that free and easy manner which she associated with young women from the States. The girls talked in voices rather high, perhaps, and accents unmistakable yet not unpleasant, while hardly noticing the quiet little lady, until that afternoon when everyone took to

wearing the small paper flags of their country, when she began the conversation.

"You are wearing your colours, I see," glancing at Elizabeth who had attached a miniature Stars and Stripes to her buttonhole. Both Americans smiled and the younger somewhat eagerly responded, "Everybody is doing it today, and it seems to make us feel better. . . ."

"In that case," replied the stranger, "I must buy one too—" and she called a boy to her and purchased the Union Jack.

"Do you think we shall get away from here soon?" Elizabeth ventured, pushed on by her anxiety which was keen that afternoon.

"So soon as the mobilization is over, then there would be no harm trying," the lady rejoined, "but, of course, you saw the notice in the Consulate telling us all to remain quite quiet until it was well for us to move?"

The girls had seen a similar notice, couched in terms of entreaty and signed by Mr. Bryan, but it had never occurred to them to pay any attention to it, and they said so. The other was surprised, even shocked, though she did not show it, merely adding a trifle coldly:

"Of course you want to go home—everybody does. But I was thinking today that of all people here the Americans are the most fortunate. The American women are sure of seeing their men alive and well when they do get home."

This was a new idea and the two digested it in silence.

"Then why don't the English rush home at once?" Sydney cried!

"You saw the notice," answered the other with finality. "We are *ordered* to stay!"

Later in her life, Sydney was to realize that the

difference in point of view was national. At the moment she thought that Englishwomen must be rather poor creatures. At the same time she wished to disclaim for herself and Elizabeth any particular sense of hardship.

"I'm rather glad, Bess," she said meditatively, "that I haven't anybody at home who is upset and worried by all this."

Elizabeth's expression was impatient. She was by no means a selfish person, yet her feeling if analysed really was that if nations all went mad together, they must expect such tragedies. If Europe was really so impossible as to begin universal war for "no reason," as she put it, of course their people must suffer. But why couldn't they let the Americans—who were so much more sensible and self-controlled—get out of their way first?

"I should have thought somehow that England might have managed to stay out!" she remarked.

"On the contrary," replied their acquaintance still quite tranquilly, "we were all of us most dreadfully afraid that she might—and thankful beyond measure that we are able to look one another in the face."

Unable to cope further with the conversation, Elizabeth murmured something and was silent. The stranger turned to Sydney with some observation about their trip, and Sydney was glad enough to leave the outbreak of war and all the ignorance of which it convicted them, for something pleasanter. By and by she proffered their names and heard the elderly lady's. She was a Miss Violand—Miss Helen Violand, lived in London, quite alone; and for many years had been accustomed to spend Whitsuntide in France.

"But this year," she concluded, "I thought I would try Montreux for a change. Wasn't it odd?"

"Luckily, we too gave up Germany," Sydney said,

wondering when Whitsuntide was and not daring to ask. "We came to Switzerland because I did so want to see the Alps."

She looked across the lake to where the rosy cloud of Mont Blanc lifted like some distant flower and her eyes dreamed upon it. Miss Violand studied the two young faces. At first sight she had thought that one was pretty and one was plain; at the second she decided that one was pretty and the other full of an exotic quality hard to define, which had a beauty of its own, charged with sensitiveness and vitality.

By the next afternoon she had drawn their story from them—it was highly typical and to Miss Violand's experience, entirely strange. Elizabeth Chapin and Sydney Lea had met and become friends at college. The elder was from the west: the younger from New England. Both had sprung from families knowing a regularity of life and ease of circumstance ignored by the novelist—a part of the firm underlying texture of the American social fabric. The father of Elizabeth was in business; he was amply able to support a daughter, but he was neither grieved nor surprised to find that his daughter had no desire to be supported. They were on excellent terms; but Mr. Chapin's second marriage had given Elizabeth a sufficient excuse to prolong her college career into a fellowship. Her father had been entirely willing that she would take the European journey which is held to be the birth-right of every American girl. Elizabeth carried with her on her travels, if she had but known it, an atmosphere which enfolded her as completely as a diver's helmet, which kept the significance of all she saw, in its broader aspects, at least, from reaching her mind or adding to her stock of convictions. She was not provincial more than was natural; she

had kept a certain womanly freshness and added it to practical shrewdness and common sense. But her profound feeling that Europe was "different" was not accompanied by any knowledge of the difference, nor any wish to possess such a knowledge. Born in society where, if her name was Chapin, the names of her friends were as likely to be Mosenheimer or Caporetti; Elizabeth was not apt to have that strong sense of nationality which might have better explained the present situation to her. The Mosenheimers, Chapins, and Caporettis were all good Americans—up to the present, that is. How then was Elizabeth to understand the blind forces of race? Her twenty-four years had been spent very largely among persons of her own age and sex. She had advanced views of the suffrage question—but was not militant. Elizabeth's strength lay in her courage and efficiency, and, if her mind was closed to a good many subjects, life was thereby made much simpler for her.

So Sydney often reflected with a touch of regret. Her own situation was very different and it had not so far been made easier by the restlessness of her imagination. She had remembered no parents—both had been killed in an accident, when she was a little girl, and the only picture that her mind retained at all, was of a man, quite vague in personality, who read or recited poetry to her on winter evenings. Most of her girlhood had been spent at school, with holidays at an aunt's. A college course was the normal career for a girl of her passionate interest in books; the trustee of her father's estate had never discouraged it, because, although it left Sydney with a thousand or two less, it was education, and nobody supposed that she ever meant to be idle. In truth, that came near to being what Sydney had meant. Despite her New England up-

bringing and her consciousness of vague and venturesome stirrings, she had as yet felt no desire for a career of any sort. She had read both widely and thoroughly, and in her present mood, she was by way of feeling that all her time and energy were needed to relate this mass of reading—this vicarious experience contained in literature—to the real experience of life. She found herself perpetually noting and comparing and trying to understand; being intensely elated when this process brought a result, and proportionately puzzled and distressed when it did not. A nature like Elizabeth's, moving on well-laid rails of training and purpose toward definite ends, became more and more of a marvel to her, although it was a nature to be respected and loved.

In her classes, Sydney's work had been erratic and unequal though at times remarkably brilliant. Over her classmates she had obtained a strong influence, of which the cause seemed chiefly to lie in her penetrative imagination. On the whole, the four years had not satisfied her as it had Elizabeth; and Sydney had regarded them much more in the light of preparation than of an end in themselves. The society of her own age and sex left her cold—a coldness of which she was secretly ashamed. However she had graduated well enough to secure a position on the staff of a woman's paper in the college town, and she had spent more money—not without protest from her trustee this time—in a course of stenography and typewriting. This position she had held till a lucky encounter had led to a better opening in no less a place than New York. Such an exciting prospect as this took her breath away and justified every rashness of a trip across the sea. Her trustee pointed out that such a journey would reduce Sydney's fortune to a very few thousand dol-

lars—far too few to live on as her father would have wished. But the trustee was soft-hearted and her daring had its appeal; if she chose to sell a bond or two and spend the proceeds in this manner, who could blame her? Moreover, his recollection of Edmund Lea, the girl's father, with his courage and daring, love of poetry and love of experience, made it quite certain that *he* would never have denied her.

Such were the simple histories which Miss Vio-land heard in several instalments, and simple as they were, yet in their independence and activity, their absence of any deterrent authority, the attitude toward money—"quite as though it didn't matter and one could always be sure of getting it!" as the hearer told herself—she felt them as absolutely novel. Not the two travelling alone puzzled her,—ever so many English girls went about alone, although not generally in their early twenties or on a journey of three thousand miles—but it was the curious professional way it was done. "And not a bit like *Daisy Miller!*" she inwardly commented.

CHAPTER III

"You look tired, both of you," said Miss Violand sympathetically, as her friends came toward her and dropped upon the bench by her side.

"I should say we were!" declared Elizabeth.

"We have been hearing those everlasting women at the consulate. They are twin sisters—English—only one is married to an American, and they insist on travelling home together. But of course the married one thinks that she ought to travel with the Americans, and the English one is equally firm about travelling with the English. They spend all their time in going from their consul to ours and arguing it out until everybody is sick of them. Neither one will give in."

"Well, on my part, I have more cheerful news," said Miss Violand. "I heard—from a friend who is likely to know—that the trains to Paris will probably begin running the day after tomorrow. That means money, I should think. You both have your passports?"

"If sitting in the consulate for days and days," replied Elizabeth, "can give them to us—why yes!"

"Well, I was going to ask you a favor," the elder woman continued, "that when the time comes to move, you will let me go with you. You see I am not overstrong and my friend will not be able to travel for some time longer. I am very anxious, too, to get home."

So it was arranged. They were to meet and report progress every afternoon, and to move on just as soon as the re-opening of the banks made the journey possible. Elizabeth was frankly skeptical about when that would be and her companion's comparative indifference irritated her at times. "Sydney's

too unpractical," she told herself with impatience, "she doesn't seem to realize or to fear anything."

Realize what? Fear what? These questions the younger girl was continually trying to answer. The waves of terror which rose from that heterogeneous crowd vibrated in her soul and her nerves—but had no definite origin to her mind. She felt them everywhere—at the doors of banks where grey-faced men stood as if helpless—at telegraph offices where women lingered in tears—in the parlours of the Grand Hotel.

"I wouldn't care a bit if I could only get away from here," she heard one woman miserably say to another. "It's the being shut up like rats in a trap that makes me so nervous, Minnie. If we could only just get some money!"

"But there aren't any trains," Minnie reminded her, unsympathetically.

"There may be a train tomorrow!"

"What good is that to us?" rejoined the exasperated Minnie,—"when we have no money!"

The sagacious Elizabeth announced that she proposed to form her plans without anybody's advice or assistance. "Of course they want to keep one here as long as possible," she scornfully remarked, "until we're all starved out or the Germans have settled down to besiege the town. Why on earth don't the people at home *do* something?"

"Because we're all so awfully unimportant," her companion answered. "What does it matter if the Americans get home comfortably or not?"

Elizabeth stared at her. "I think it matters a great deal," she said with impatience. "You're so funny, Sydney! What is it to you if Europe has a war or not? . . . You know what the President says—we read it today: aren't you a neutral?"

Sydney wasn't, but she didn't push it.

"Of course, if you had a family at home, you'd be in more of a hurry to get there," Elizabeth acknowledged. "I expect Father is perfectly wild."

Miss Violand was not the only acquaintance they had made in Geneva this week, because everybody at the pension Voltaire talked to everyone else. There was a young man of Balkan nationality with a name sounding like Crackerbox, who joined Elizabeth on the street on one occasion and made himself very agreeable. That the occurrence had more significance for him than for her, was shown on the next day when he smilingly suggested getting a friend, and all four going off somewhere for several days together, *pour faire l'amour*—as he put it. He was not only disappointed, but distinctly surprised at the way his plan was received.

"*Mais Mesdemoiselles sont seules!*" he added in explanation; and Elizabeth could not deny it, though angry none the less.

There was a Greek lady who held Sydney spell-bound all one evening with an impassioned narrative in a French, little better than her own, which finally turned out to be the history of the very striking misconduct of her own grandmother! Elizabeth was highly indignant with Sydney because she was not shocked, only very much amused. Sydney, Elizabeth felt, was developing the strangest states of mind and the most unaccountable re-actions. A trip to Europe was a journey in order to behold the monuments of History and the masterpieces of Art and Nature; one's chief business was to survey the Alps, or the Tower of London, or the Mona Lisa. But whereas Sydney had considered the Alps, the Tower of London, the Mona Lisa with an attention which held in it something coolly impersonal, yet she had been thrilled to the soul by trifles merely curious—at least in her companion's opinion.

A skylark, which, springing up from her feet, had lost itself, singing in the blue; a London policeman standing impassive in the evening mist; a Savoyard woman, knitting, as she walked behind her cattle—these had been the sights which had brought delight into Sydney's eyes. And now—now when the whole continent had suddenly turned itself into an assemblage of dangerous lunatics and the sensible thing to do was to get back as quickly as possible to the only country where people were still sane—now was the time Sydney became really interested and began to encourage all these extraordinary people in their disgusting conversation!

Meanwhile the sun blazed on the lake all day and the electric lights beat upon it all night. Mont Blanc bloomed at sunset on the eastern sky like a great rose; the restless, variegated crowd surged back and forth with chattering lips and anxious eyes. The tall lady with white hair wearing a long white cloak, whom they had nicknamed "The Duchess of Alba," still fed the swans from the parapet; while around the Ile Rousseau clustered other swans in a neat black and white costume suggesting the most distinguished French taste.

Sydney wondered what was happening behind the barrier of Alps—what hurrying, what struggle, what agonies of farewell, what suffering

Then suddenly it all vanished. Suddenly, Geneva—its lake, its crowds, and its imprisonment, slipped over the edge of time and was gone. Reality passed in a few hours into memory.

Elizabeth had awakened with a headache, so it was Sydney who set forth on that morning's weary errand to the bank which had become merely perfunctory. But the moment Elizabeth heard her returning step, galloping up the stairs—she knew that

something had happened. Her friend entered, waving over her head a bunch of dirty banknotes.

"Lucky, was I?—Every sou we've got—and don't lose it! The man at Cook's advised me to draw it all out when I had the chance. . . . Yes, the trains are running again though it's a beastly journey. But he says we'd better take it—because the Germans *are* trying to get to Paris, just as they did in 1870."

Then, as Elizabeth sat up, her headache gone as if by magic, Sydney pursued . . . "The mob was simply awful, but I was among the first . . . there was a brute of a man who tried to push me aside and get my place at the window, only an Englishman leaned forward and got me back into line—; that is—I thought he was an Englishman until he spoke to the creature in some sort of a beastly language and it crumpled him up so the nice man put me into the line as quickly and as neatly as possible. Anyhow I got the last French bills there were—and the Russian or Greek or whatever he was—was furious. Now shall I go and see Miss Violand?"

Later in the day, two cables arrived, one from Elizabeth's father, the other from Mr. Hansell, who acted as Sydney's trustee. Both urged an immediate return, via England, and Mr. Chapin spoke of money which would be sent there, to await their arrival. Miss Violand, too, had received some messages. Neither of her young friends at all grasped what one of them at least meant to her, when she folded it with the quiet remark: "As I feared, I shall be too late to see my nephew. He has left for France."

While packing in the strained hurry of a dream, Elizabeth had one conversation which she did not mention to Sydney, all the more because it gave her a thin chill of fear. It was with the inn-keeper, a gruff, harassed little man, whose hesitation to re-

ceive her payment changed into protest when he heard her plan. The journey was impossible—Mademoiselle had not realized that she would be wiser to stay where she was for the present. He would do all he could to make her comfortable and if money were the question, why, he could wait if necessary; Americans could be trusted. When Elizabeth, smiling and shaking her head, moved away, quite determined; he spoke more plainly. "The train goes very near to the German frontier—dangerously near—did Mademoiselle know what the Germans were? News had come through from Belgium . . ." and Elizabeth, her large, steadfast, and ignorant eyes fixed upon the man's face, heard his plain statements, and realized in utter stupefaction that he was even offering to furnish her with the means of swift and certain death. How she thanked him and declined she hardly knew; it was all confused and alarming and must not be dwelt upon.

"The things these foreigners think of!" she said to herself as she raced upstairs to her packing.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was probably no event in the lives of these two young women which they were to remember more vividly in after years than the journey from Geneva to London, in mid-August, 1914. Yet those memories were probably very different; a crisis is ever Janus-faced, and in this particular case a journey which represented to Elizabeth the end of a holiday and the release from terror—was to Sydney the beginning of an era, if not the beginning of life. And it began, as life must begin, in a sort of chaotic confusion in the dark, a departure from the Pension Voltaire just as the lamps were paling in the dawn. Although they were two hours ahead of the scheduled time for starting, yet the station was already a mob of people and their seats, in a sort of rough corridor-car, were widely separated. Later in the day, at the first change of trains, all three were fortunate enough to get places in the same carriage, but for several hours Sydney was wedged in the midst of a family who ate at strange foods, and piled knobby packages against her legs.

Against the shrill background of their foreign chatter, however, she became conscious at moments of an English voice, which seemed not quite unfamiliar, and on turning cautiously around she saw that it was indeed the Englishman whose quickness had helped her into the queue at Cook's—and whose lean activity of frame and somewhat unusual features had stamped themselves upon her memory. He was ensconced in a corner, in conversation with a man much older, his face, full of expression, vividly dra-

matized their talk, of which scattered sentences reached her ears.

"Yes, by Jove, of course one took a risk, but the chance was perfectly splendid . . . and then the consul was a friend of mine . . . no, an American and a ripper! But for him I never would have done it. He knew all the paths and I didn't want any sentries poking into my pocket-book; you may be sure of that."

Sydney heard the elder man ask something containing the words "Foreign Office."

"Well, you see I can't tell till I get there . . . one never knows what they're going to want . . ." Here a whistle from the engine drowned out the last sentence and she only caught the very end of some rather long statement ". . . So you see, one can't tell, but whatever it is, I know I shall be frightfully keen on it."

The words stuck in her memory; she wondered what the man had been doing and why the American consul knew all the paths and why the man wanted to avoid a sentry and where . . . till drowsiness clouded it all over in a veil.

The chilly dawn gave way to bright morning and that in turn to a hot noon and afternoon. At intervals one changed trains, but the crowd, the pressure, the haste, the anxiety, one never changed. Miss Violand, who was looking very white and fragile, dozed as well as she could in a corner. Elizabeth tried to read. . . .

Paris. . . . At this point both of their memories became confused. To Elizabeth, Paris meant long waits at Consulates and banks and money-changers; anxious consultations over the French for this and that—and the concentrated pre-occupation of everybody; war-bread, and the general feeling, as she expressed it that "the heel of Europe was in her back."

To her friend, Paris was the memory of something dauntless and beautiful, a city which blazed with flags, whose pavements glittered with August sunshine; whose taxis went faster around corners than taxis ever went before; whose people hurried with smiling lips and anguished eyes.

It seemed to Sydney as though new ideas and impressions, new values in life, began to come faster and faster, so that she could hardly keep pace with them—. The quiet small hotel to which Miss Violand had taken them—for Elizabeth had early avowed her ignorance of Paris hotels—held more English people than Americans. But they had both fallen into conversation that first evening, with a charming girl from New York, whose acute appraising eyes had made more of them than ever they made of her exceedingly smart clothes, narrow shoes, hand-made blouses, little watch crusted with diamonds and picturesquely simple hat.

“She’s lovely,” Elizabeth had declared in response to Sydney’s enthusiastic admiration, “but really all that sort cares for in France, is the jewelry and clothes.”

Later on their way into the street, the two met Miss Lisenpenard in the full uniform of a hospital nurse. She extended her hand with a smile. “I’m afraid I won’t be here tomorrow to wish you a *Bon Voyage*” she observed with a nod toward her suit-case, “You see I’m off in half an hour—my base is Amiens.”

“Then you’re not going home?” Elizabeth’s voice showed amazement—“but I thought—” she paused in confusion.

“To America—I? Oh, dear, no—why, what made you think so?” said the other, opening her eyes. “I never intended to sail for a moment. There’s too much to do here.”

"But then you're not afraid? They say that the Germans—" and once more Elizabeth paused before the steadiness of the other's eyes.

"I'm not in the least afraid, thank you," said Miss Lispenard with her cool little smile; and she shook hands and bade them both good-bye.

"Well, of course it's all very fine," was Elizabeth's comment as she walked with Sydney into the street, "but I should think her place would be at home instead of getting herself mixed up with things which are none of her business."

"I think she's perfectly splendid," Sydney answered, shaken with the intensity of her own voice and manner.

"To my mind, home is good enough for most people in times like these," persisted Elizabeth, "and there's plenty of work to be done there too—only, of course, it's not so picturesque as nursing soldiers and all that. I think it's the duty of every American to go home as fast as he possibly can and remain neutral, as the President asks us to do."

"There's no use arguing with you, Bess, when you're speaking in that voice," Sydney answered, "but you're talking nonsense—and so is he."

"I'm *not* talking nonsense. All this seems to have unbalanced you. You know perfectly well what I mean. That type of society girl who spends all her time over here, doesn't represent the American point of view in any way. I don't object to her nursing—only she's not wanted—you can see for yourself that the French don't want us, can't you? It's no affair of the United States. Even George Washington said that—" Elizabeth alleged triumphantly. "You don't seem to be patriotic in the least."

"Well, if the American woman isn't going to do her part in this war," Sydney replied, "then I'm ashamed of her, that's all."

It was not the last time that she was to experience the curious disappointment and disillusion in respect to the point of view, not only of Elizabeth, but of the more educated and cultivated members of society generally, whether of her own or of other countries, or to learn how badly the intellectuals as a body were to fail the world at this crisis. It was not the last time she was to note the ignorance of the well-informed; the indifference of the sensitive; the narrow-mindedness of the cosmopolite; the savage ferocity of the civilized; and the purblind dullness of the farseeing. On the other hand, she was to find these things offset by phenomena just as curious; by the devotion and self-sacrifice of the self-indulgent; by the admirable co-operation of the untrained; by the deep piety and religious fervor of the fool who continued to say in his heart that there was no God; by the heroism of the frivolous; and by the idealism of the materialist. Elizabeth's passionate desire for home, Sydney could not resent, although she did not share it—but it was a shock to find that she disparaged those who were not running away from the spectacle of human suffering and death, and that she took refuge in Presidential catchwords in order to justify her own evasion. That *was* a shock; and one which must not be talked about. This universal pain, grief, and effort which wrung Sydney's heart and strained her nerves yet added a terrible fascination to the spectacle of life—how could Elizabeth patronize them as she did—with her little air of inward exultation at the security of home? How could she talk as she did about trunks, passports, and the rate of exchange, and the necessity of getting a lot of idle tourists out of the way?

"We don't matter at all—not at all—unless we help!" she broke out fiercely, as her gaze fell on a notice fastened to the closed shutters of a shop win-

dow: "Fermé; le personnel est sous les drapeaux."

"Of course we will help," her companion hastened to rejoin, not unmoved by the emotion in her friend's voice. "You remember what we heard at the Embassy—that everywhere we were opening bureaus for relief already. . . . You mustn't think, Syd, that I don't admire that girl for laying aside her luxurious habits and working hard, no doubt for the first time in her life. It will be a great experience for her—though naturally they don't send nurses anywhere near the danger."

Fortunately for Elizabeth, she was not a person to contrast her own preconceptions with the facts. Her enlightenment came in time, as did the world's. No doubt there were many intelligent Americans and even some English who visualized the same sort of orderly battle, in which certain bodies of neatly-dressed men attacked one another with artillery in an honourable and perfunctory manner, at the end of which, if the Germans, let us say, were the victors, they entered the disputed village and remained therein, in the rôle of careful guests or benevolent police. This vision had been a good deal coloured by the insistence on the German army as a scientific and well-trained body—a description interpreted by the entire United States, with the utmost naiveté, according to its own conception of these terms, and the scientific and well-trained persons it happened to have known. English people also shared these extraordinary delusions and regarded the actual concomitants of German invasion either as the invention of the yellow press or the exhalations from unbalanced minds. Not the French—they had seen 1870! Therefore, one should not laugh at Elizabeth's view—but wonder, rather, why her companion, with just as little knowledge, was so absolutely certain that it was wrong.

Paris seemed to contain almost as little authoritative news as Geneva, but the atmosphere was not reassuring and clouded the last half of their journey with depression. Miss Violand said little; her blue eyes seemed anxiously fixed upon some distant vision. Her two companions were on a sudden very tired. Elizabeth had felt the strain more acutely and so much so that she could hardly rouse from her fatigue at the sight of the channel, or the cliffs of Dover white with tents, or the scouting aeroplane which dipped and rose over the sea. England, where her language was spoken and where the people were calm and showed no panic, seemed to her like a house of a friend.

CHAPTER V

ELIZABETH did not throw off the fatigues of the journey as quickly as usual, and instead of rushing around the next morning to Cockspur Street, to see about their sailing as she confidently expected to do—she preferred to rest.

But London, immovable as law and eternal as the stars; London, more full of activity than in most Augusts, perhaps, but wearing still a homely and familiar face, expressive of order and power—London was not a place in which to feel panic, and Elizabeth soon recovered from hers. The lodging-house where they had stayed earlier in the summer was much the same. Only the sea voyage, into which, it is true, a thought of enemy raiders might intrude, lay ahead, with home at the end of it.

Her preoccupation with her own thoughts and relief was so great that Elizabeth failed to notice the absorbed state of her companion. Since their argument in Paris over the duties of the American, Sydney had avoided all discussion of the subject. Her mind was occupied in straining over the problems new to it and her gaze seemed to be turned inward. She gladly took her share of the tasks which had earlier fallen to her more practical fellow-traveller; she attended to formalities; sent cablegrams; and did errands in the City. She also made certain inquiries and completed certain arrangements respecting which she said nothing to her companion.

Their cabin was secured on the small Cunarder expecting to sail on the last day of August; and on the first day she felt able, Elizabeth went to the United States consul, who chanced to be an acquain-

tance of her father's, and had a long conversation with him. He was very patient and kind, advised her on no account to give up her carefully chosen cabin for the makeshifts which would be the only possibility; and succeeded in convincing her, that, however black things looked—and he could not say they looked well—there was small chance that the German army could get to England in time to prevent her leaving by the last of August. Then he turned his attention to the next terrified or worried person whose ticket or passport he must look at, or whose vacillations he must set at rest.

"There ought to be a special suite in heaven set apart for consuls," she told Sydney when she joined her. "Did you get your *visé*?"

Sydney shook her head. "No, Bess," she answered very gently, "I didn't; because, you see, I've decided not to go home after all."

For a moment Bess was dumb. "You are going to stay?" she repeated incredulously.

"I am going to stay."

"In England?"

"In London, for the present."

"But, Sydney, your work—your position!" cried poor Elizabeth.

"I have already written to them giving it up—and by the same mail I wrote to Mr. Hansell—" then, seeing her friend's distress and dismay, she continued, "You must not be angry with me, Bess dear—I simply had to do it. It's not the same at all with me as it is with many people. You know how very alone I am—there's nobody to whom it would matter *really*, whether I live in England or in America. I know we haven't felt at all the same about this war—not from the first. Europe did not interest me much before it happened; it seemed just like a series of vast galleries and museums—rather

wearying—but now! There's so much to be done."

"But Sydney, you mad, mad creature! You haven't thought! You can't afford it—what are you going to live on—how are you going to live?"

"Well," answered Sydney composedly, "yesterday I sold my passage ticket to that nice Miss Vincent at our lodgings—she's crazy to get home on account of her mother. That's £25. Then there's ten or fifteen pounds left on my letter of credit, and you said—didn't you?—that of the money your father sent, ten pounds had been added by Mr. Hansell for me. That £50 ought to do for the present until he gets my letter."

This evidence of thought and careful calculation stabbed Elizabeth like a disloyalty. The friendship of these two had a very real foundation; no one knew Sydney's possibilities better than her friend, whether of mind or of character, and the last two weeks had not been without their effect. Yet that Sydney should remain alone in London, through all the sinister chances of the future, was something to which Elizabeth could not consent without a struggle. She changed the tone of the protest, however, and no longer spoke of the plan as though it were a foolish caprice. Rather she argued against it seriously and steadily, using all her battery of common sense and prudent counsel. But the girl was not to be shaken. Elizabeth never knew, never was to know, how much contact with herself and other fellow-Americans since August first had influenced Sydney's decision not to return. To the younger girl, the outbreak of war had been something intense and crucial—a trumpet-call to every emotion, to every energy of her being. Not only that, but in this spectacle of the suffering and terror of the humble, in the universal self-sacrifice and courage, she seemed to draw a deeper compre-

hension, a more profound inspiration. The change in her, the call to her, can only be described as religious. And at the same moment as this suffering—side by side with this greatest of all sacrifices,—she had beheld Elizabeth and her fellow countrymen generally, busied about their personal safety, occupied with their insignificant comfort, panic-stricken, credulous, thanking God that they were not as other men! Return to *that* atmosphere—when every day the invader drew nearer—never!

She brushed most of her friend's arguments aside, therefore, with a manner which showed as nothing else could have done, their differing sense of values; but when it came to the practical aspect of her project, her answers were perfectly clear. As regards work, she had already secured it, and was to begin to-morrow.

"It was on one of those streets near the Park—Mayfair, they call it, don't they?—and I was walking along thinking what I could do. One of those big houses had evidently been opened as a hospital—there was a flag over the door and a Red Cross sign. Just as I passed they were lifting a man into the hall-way from an ambulance. The nurse came running; she looked awfully tired and confused. The driver had evidently spoken to her about keeping the wounded man waiting and I heard her answer."

"Well?" Elizabeth interjected, breathless.

"She said, 'Of course; there should be someone in the office to attend to this—I know that as well as you do! But we haven't found anyone yet—and what can I do? I am leaving a bad case as it is!' So after the man had been carried upstairs, I went in and offered myself."

"Sydney, you didn't! Well, what did she say?"

"She was so overcome that I think she hardly

heard what I was saying—but she jumped at it. You see, they had just moved in and already the beds were full. Most of the nurses were lady-amateurs in high-heeled slippers and strings of pearls. She and another woman were the only professionals—and they had not taken off their clothes for three nights."

"But still," Elizabeth said incredulously, "were they willing to take you in out of the street, like that?"

"Oh, I showed her my passport, and told her our consul would answer for me (you'll have to see to that, Bess) and I told her that I could typewrite. There was a machine there—very old-fashioned. She just said, 'Quite so' and 'Oh, yes,' but I'm sure she would have taken me if I had been a circus-rider. So I took off my hat and spent a couple of hours there trying to get order out of chaos. You never saw such a *muddle* in your life—doctors coming and going, supplies arriving, and the telephone. . . .! When I went, she thanked me and said, 'You really will come to-morrow? Americans are splendid!'"

"And you are going to work there every day—for nothing?"

"For the present, anyhow."

"I shall insist," said Elizabeth, "in your writing about it to Miss Violand—I wish she were in London!"

Sydney did so and answer came in due course, but Elizabeth was forced to acknowledge that it was of little service. Miss Violand wrote warmly of Sydney's sympathy and wish to help; she knew that they could always "count on the Americans." At the same time the idea of any young lady following such a course was evidently to be regarded with caution. Girls were so independent these days;

no doubt the war would make a great deal of difference in the matter of chaperonage. . . . She hoped Sydney would do nothing rash. As a matter of fact, this letter in the eyes of Miss Chapin, English reader at Chillingsworth College for Women, had exactly the opposite effect to that intended, and after reading it Elizabeth practically withdrew her opposition. The "young lady" and the adjective "rash" were sufficient to show the difference in their points of view. To her mind, Sydney was relinquishing a promising career for a wild scheme born of war-excitement, but the inalienable rights of the American girl could not be affected by any talk of young women and their chaperons.

"They're miles behind us, aren't they?" was all she remarked.

Miss Violand's letter did not arrive until Sydney had been at work in the hospital for several days. As she said, there never was such a muddle; individual muddle super-imposed upon a muddle which appeared to be national and of which nobody seemed ashamed. Patients had been accepted before the equipment was complete, and the zeal of volunteer nurses only added to Sister Lucy's perplexities. There was no proper filing system, whether of records or supplies; and every form of preparation looked forward only to the next week. Sydney's position was hardly defined; at first she did a little of everything that the nurses had no time for. She ordered supplies; she ran errands; she improvised a card-catalogue in paste-board boxes; and she filled in forms for the helpless young volunteers in high-heeled slippers whose will was so much greater than their knowledge. It was she who ran out into the street and guided the stretcher bearers into the house. It was she who answered the telephone—and the trembling questions which came out of it.

Later on, the visiting relatives of patients became her especial charge, a task which she prepared for by intelligent attention to what the surgeons said. Little by little it was to her they chiefly talked; of all matters, that is, with which Sister Lucy should not be bothered. Sydney's unusual quickness, her college training, stood her in good stead now.

Even Elizabeth began to be interested. She too ran errands, she gave advice, and she did not appear to be sorry when word came that her ship had delayed its sailing for a few days. Also, she had no return of panic, although during all this crowded time the news grew graver, hour by hour.

Sydney never afterward recalled the retreat from Mons but as a chaotic haste and muddle of tasks, one never finished before the next must be begun. Hurry, suffering, pain, grief, and hurry again; burning feet and aching head, the smell of ether and iodoform, stretchers and surgeons and more stretchers—these things stumbled and trod over each other during the hours. Perhaps there might be a moment at night to run back for a word to Elizabeth, with gratitude that she was still there; but on the whole one's heart and thoughts were concentrated on that slowly retreating line in Flanders, of which the white-faced women, the surgeons, and the stretchers seemed actually to form a part.

The days fled on, the time of parting came at last . . . the great shed at Euston, the noise, the confusion as they clung together, Elizabeth's arm around her, Elizabeth's warm, wet cheek against her own . . . and then, no more Elizabeth. . . .

Sydney walked out of the train-shed into the street and stood for a moment. The pale September sunshine lay on the roaring London pavement; the sky was full of small high clouds. Today was the opening of a new chapter, and the girl drew a long, reso-

lute breath as she turned her steps toward her work. And then, as she crossed over to the corner where she must take her 'bus, she became suddenly aware that the people who waited were all buying papers or opening them eagerly, that there was a stir and a rustle all down the street and a quickening of steps—an animation and a fresh current of life, heightened by the sudden clamor of newsboys' voices. The battle of the Marne had begun.

Book II
NEW TRAILS



CHAPTER VI

SIR THOMAS EASTERLY, of Easterly Park, Herts, was member of Parliament for a Conservative borough which had survived all the changes and upheavals of the Gladstonian epoch. Sir Thomas himself had in his youth been numbered among that group known as "Dizzy's young men"; he could look back upon actual strolls with the Tory chieftain down St. James's street or along Pall Mall—and he could remember occasions when a walk through the Green Park with "Monty" Corry, marked the turning point in a man's political career. The traditions and ideas born of such beginnings had crystallized and stood firm within him against all the shocks caused by the Liberal uprising and its successes. Dazzling as these had been, they had never tempted him to widen his bounds, although he realized that the broadest Tory of his youth could not hope to reach the limits set by the narrowest Unionist of his middle age. Politics are as much an affair of temperament as of conviction, and Sir Thomas Easterly's temperament was eminently conservative. He looked just what he was, a healthy, out-of-doors man; a sound, safe man whatever his party, with the steadfast eye and deliberate speech which served to free him from any undesirable imputation of brilliancy.

The time was to come when Englishmen of his generation were to look back upon life as they had lived it in their youth, with an amazement which bore with it moments of positive revelation. The security, the fullness, the honour of the Victorian age, wore to their minds that pleasant aspect which a safe harbor, shining in sunlight, wears to the captain of

a ship whose every anchor is dragging in the storm. Many of them may have felt that it was to their own or their father's unconscious actions they owed it that cables were rusty and anchors inadequate when the gale broke, but this Thomas Easterly personally, could not feel. He and his were sprung from the soil, they were a part and parcel of things as they are. His grandfather, even in bad years, had made the Easterly Estate pay. His father had been a pillar of the Squirearchy; and Sir Thomas, if too busy a politician to be prominent as a sportsman, yet had done all which could be done, in that connection, by marrying a wife from the same county, and bringing up his family in the country. The Easterly boys were to be seen on their ponies almost as soon as they were out of their perambulators; and the family circumstances partook of that large ease and comfortable outdoor activity which was still to be enjoyed by the English gentleman in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. Life, to the Easterlys, had presented itself in an unbroken series of small successes; it had so far—could they but have realized it,—far more satisfaction and far fewer contentions than was general even then—and it all took place tranquilly, comfortably according to tradition and behind high walls. At the outbreak of the War the head of the family was in his sixtieth year, a large, fresh-coloured solid, serious man with an immovable face and grey hair. His wife was large too, full-bosomed and deep-voiced, with a straight back, placid eyes, a steady mouth, and hair dressed à la reine Alexandra.

The troubled Parliamentary session of May-July 1914 kept Sir Thomas in London, where his strong Unionist influence made him exceedingly busy, so that his family lamented loudly when he could not manage to get down to them in the country for even a

week-end. The Irish situation, however, created by "obtuse blindness" as Mr. Balfour put it, had suddenly revealed such an acute weakness in the Government, such a chaos of conflicting parties, that any sensible and steady man found himself both alarmed and confused. But the alarm and confusion of mid-July respecting Ireland, deepened suddenly into horror and bewilderment respecting the Empire itself, when the tragic developments of the last week swept all party politics off the stage.

No man had a deeper seriousness regarding the situation on August first, than Thomas Easterly, and this seriousness joined as it was to firmness, withstood ministerial vacillations and brought him an accumulation of responsibilities, as such qualities were bound to do. The tenth of August found him Chairman of several important Committees; he seemed a rock which supported not only the more nervous elements in his own party, but notable Liberals as well. The crisis undoubtedly called for individuals of his stamp—of that class which was less suggestible and less susceptible to panic than were the more flexible and excitable politicians who had come to the fore during the Liberal régime. A re-crudescence of large, stolid, elderly Englishmen was to be seen in high places—whence they had been conspicuously absent and they formed in politics—these old Contemptibles, a bulwark against which weakness strengthened itself and terror gave way to steadfastness.

This was a heavy task but there was more. The three Easterly boys were all in London, clamoring at the door of the War Office, and composing frantic epistles on which their father must immediately give his advice. They ran in and they ran out and they shouted each other down on the hearth rug with all the energy of their youth. So little time seemed to

be left for any real discussion of their various abilities and suitabilities. Middleton was for the Artillery, and Tom had already joined his regiment by virtue of his work as a Territorial. Hugh, the youngest and in his second year at Oxford, must needs go in for this new-fangled flying business—a very doubtful and risky branch of the service, his father thought,—but there was no time to consider the pros and cons of the matter with the impatient lad. Sir Thomas, as he sat there noting as never before, their keen faces, straight limbs and bright eyes flashing now with excitement,—dully wondered why it was that not one of the three had ever even remotely considered the Army as a career. Tom cared about nothing but the country life and had already acted as his father's agent. The Bar, with politics as a future, had been Middleton's intention ever since he left Eton—whereas Hughie—well, Hughie was artistic and spent a good deal too much time and money, in his family's opinion, on very modern verse and his violin. And to hear him now!

Ten days later, Sir Thomas in his large, dignified limousine, drew up at the door of Easterly Park, which was opened to him in a manner of respectful concentration by Smith, his butler. Sir Thomas alighted, heavily and wearily, and entered his own house. He was not imaginative, but he did remember having left it, some weeks before, seriously worried about the state of Ulster! . . .

He stood still, looking about him and Smith advanced to take his coat. Smith was Smith, and Sir Thomas was Sir Thomas, but their eyes, meeting at that instant in a long look, were the eyes of two Englishmen who were friends.

“James 'ave left to join up, Sir Thomas,” Smith observed in a low confidential voice; (James was the

gamekeeper and his son) "and so 'as William, so we are a bit short 'anded at present."

His master digested this information in silence, with a nod of approbation.

"And in the village?"

"Several of the lads are off already, Sir Thomas. Old Parkin and Dewey 'ave been up to talk with you about their sons. I think old Dewey is outside now, Sir Thomas, 'earing you was expected."

"I will talk to him later."

"Very good, Sir Thomas. Her Ladyship is in the morning-room."

His master nodded again. As he passed the drawing-room door, he noticed in a strange sort of way which yet held no surprise, that the furniture was in Holland covers instead of its bright colors, that the carpet was rolled back and the centre of the room occupied by a long table at which stood his daughter Jane, wearing an apron, and armed with a pair of shears. Sir Thomas mounted the stairs with these and other changes in mind, yet taking pleasure as he never failed to do, in the fresh orderliness of his home, in the flowers and the silver and the mauve and white chintz of his wife's favorite room. After the tension, the pain of this last fortnight he felt it anew as a refreshment and longed suddenly for her presence as part of it all.

Lady Easterly's life had held so far few disappointments, but had flowed evenly on the full tide of affection, respect and ample means. Her sons and their career; Middleton's tendency to shirk responsibility, Tom's delicacy in boyhood, Hugh's vacillation between verse and violin, had been only ripples on this current. Janey—like many English girls, presented no problems; she was no beauty, but she had rosy cheeks and a docile manner and craved neither the vote nor the tango. Really, it was

rather absurd, at least her brother Hugh thought, how little Janey coveted a latch-key in Chelsea or a studio in Hampstead—she was entirely *vieux jeu*. She suited her mother, needless to say, extremely well. Sir Thomas's political career had not required of his wife any higher degree of energy or intelligence than she possessed by nature. Lady Easterly was hospitable, but their dinner-parties had no need to be sparkling and her husband had never expected her to act as a party hostess. She fitted in; and that was about all that could be said, except by those who loved her—that is, she *had* fitted in up to the present, and her husband personally never doubted the future for an instant or that her serene middle-age had reserves both of steadfastness and strength. It is doubtful if he had ever more sincerely admired her,—even during her slim girlhood—than he did this afternoon as she rose from her desk to greet him, her mouth smiling below her darkened, anxious eyes.

“My dear!” was all he said for the moment as he held her hand “My dear!”

“I got Hugh’s telegram an hour ago,” she began in her deep, untouched voice. “Of course, I quite expected it—and nothing would have kept me from running up to town again, as you know, only he did not seem to know exactly where he would be. Then the village people kept coming to talk it over, and many of the women were dreadfully upset. Janey and I got up a work-party at once and I went in this morning to St. Albans for the materials so we can start tomorrow. It will steady them down—it is the only way. You saw Hugh?”

“Only for a moment: he was very much excited. He will be sent to a place to train first, of course. I confess, Ada, it bothers me—I have no such confidence in this air business, as he seems to have.”

"I know."

"Middleton sent love to Janey and you. There was no time to write before the battery left for France—just when, I don't know."

"And Tom?"

"There was some medical question, I believe, but Menzies saw to it and he came through all right. He was much less excited than the others so far as I can see. But then, I've had so little time. The muddle has been tremendous, dear, even worse than I feared and you know just how I felt after those fellows resigned. Whigs never have known the first thing about war."

"But do we either—about this kind of war? I doubt it. . . . Have you seen Adrian?"

Sir Thomas had lowered himself comfortably into the armchair which best fitted his large frame and already his face began to relax its strained lines. He laid his head back and his eyes happily rested on his wife as he answered her question.

"Yes, I dined with him last night and went on to the House. We had a long talk; I cannot say a reassuring one. You know Adrian's Olympian way; but even his judgment, which surveys things from so high up, is not satisfied with them."

"He surely does not doubt that we shall win?"

"Ultimately, no: we must. But who can trust this crew, Ada? Even Adrian though he claims to be Liberal has no real confidence in their ability to put the right men at the head. Haldane is a brilliant fellow, but imagine considering him even for a moment as Minister of War! Adrian simply went to the Palace, and made the little man insist."

"And Adrian himself?"

"Later, if there's a Coalition, he thinks he is fairly sure of being asked to join the Cabinet."

"*She will love that, won't she? How we shall all suffer!*"

"She won't matter as much as usual. And Adrian is wonderful. The only thing is—he works best, unhampered by the public eye—so he may not accept after all."

"Surely that would be a great mistake," said Lady Easterly with conviction.

"Not if he can accomplish more. And in this present muddle. . . ."

"Is it so very bad?" Ada Easterly touched the bell, turning her face eagerly toward her husband, while he talked as a man talks who has seen things go wrong and yet kept silence. Then tea came in and Janey ran upstairs to give her father a kiss and tell him what the villagers said and thought about it all. Sir Thomas felt comforted by these sweet habitual things, as he drank his tea. They spoke about the boys and asked him questions and during the pauses he tried to persuade himself that the absence of the drawing-room carpet and of William and James were due to natural causes.

Odd how the tension affected one! Sir Thomas found himself noticing for the first time that Janey had inherited her mother's tranquil blue eyes and also finding himself suddenly very glad indeed that there was a girl. This was not due to sentiment merely; but when one recalled the three boys tramping about the dining-room at Charles Street and pouring out their plans in a stream of eager talk—why, one was glad of Janey, that was all. That chill contraction of the heart—which he must not mention to his wife—grew less because Janey was there.

CHAPTER VII

DURING those few days at home, Sir Thomas found himself better able to visualize the situation than he had been in the chaos of town. His doubts and fears also began to take definite form. Not that he had for one instant doubted the necessity for War; but in his slow way, he had a certain foresight, and he was wholly at variance with his colleagues who thought the whole business was going to be all over in a few weeks. The Government's unwillingness to face conscription was not excused to his mind by the flood of recruits which so stimulated the public during those first months; and the posters which met his eye everywhere he turned were a poor substitute for firmness. He saw the departure of his own and his friends' sons with a misgiving which no confidence in the War Office could lessen; and, the graver grew the news, the stiffer became his determination and the deeper his sense of national inadequacy.

"It's going to be the hardest pull we've ever had," was his prophesy.

For the Easterly family, it was a very hard pull indeed. Tom was killed at the very end of the Marne battle; and two months later the news came,—in the same week—of Middleton's wound and of the accident to Hugh. The elder son's case turned out to be unimportant; he was back after awhile on sick leave, looking pallid and different somehow, and very bitter against the way things were being

run by his superiors. But Hugh's injury was another matter. He had fallen in his machine at Dunkirk; his head was badly cut with severe concussion, and there were doubts about the spine. . . . For weeks it seemed impossible that he should live . . . and then weeks in which one could only hope that he might not.

It was in November that he was brought to Sister Lucy's hospital on Great Stanhope Street—a limp, wasted rag of youth in whose eyes was no desire of life.

Sydney Lea, seated at her desk in the office, marked the upright figure of the elderly gentleman as he went in and out to see his son. She had heard about the case from Sister Lucy; told in those staccato sentences and with that wry twist of cynical mouth that was Sister Lucy's way. Sydney made it a point to leave a bunch of late violets on the boy's pillow and ask him how he felt. The unfamiliar intonation had brought his gaze to her face for a second with a faint gleam of interest which yet died out in a moan. On that very bad afternoon when it seemed for a time as if he were lapsing into a last unconsciousness, Sir Thomas felt suddenly, on the stairs, too tired to leave the hospital. He turned aside mechanically into the office, sought the chair that stood there by the hearth, fell into it, wiped his forehead and stared into the fire. The silence which he carried with him told far more than any words and caused Sydney to glance at him in compassion. What she saw took her out of the room for a few minutes; and when he became aware of her return, she was standing before him, a cup of tea in her hand.

"You must be very tired," she said, in a matter-of-fact voice; "won't you have this?"

The tea was just what Sir Thomas needed and he was grateful, thanking her in his correct, see-saw intonation, in which was no trace of any emotion. As he drank it, he glanced about him at the business-like orderliness of the room, at the typewriter and the files, at the precision and quickness in the movements of the girl at the desk. She was here; she was there; she was answering the telephone; she was speaking to Sister Lucy at the foot of the stairs, she was checking hot-water bags or surgical bandages or writing receipts for them—and all this without bustle or asking questions. Sir Thomas had seen something lately of Government offices and he marvelled. There was something unfamiliar about the slender alertness of her figure; the face with the dark and intense eyes, the narrow hand, and the tasteful plainness of her dress.

"You are surely not English?" he asked her suddenly and Sydney told him her story.

"Well, well!" remarked Sir Thomas, "and so you are staying on to help us—very gratifying, I call it, and I hope it means that your country in general feels the same way."

"I am sure it does!" she cried loyally, but yet she was not sure.

"It would make such a difference to us if we felt that—but of course you have a great problem in your foreign population" continued Sir Thomas, largely because it rested him to take his mind from the boy upstairs. Just then an enquiry came over the telephone and Sydney was at her files and back again to answer it—in less than no time. So he asked her about her method setting down his tea-cup, and Sydney felt inclined to laugh when she saw how her answers amazed him.

"All that you were taught in the States—? How

very remarkable!—We have certainly much to learn from you there," observed Sir Thomas, thinking of the slow muddle in which his Oxford-bred secretary had involved his affairs. He bade Sydney a formal, grateful farewell and went out into the fog—and she knew that he was wondering if the boy would be alive when next he returned. He had not mentioned where he lived, of course; but directories are plenty, and when the surgeon came later that evening and seemed to feel a shade more hopeful, Sydney took it upon herself to telephone the encouragement to Charles Street. The fresh girl voice that replied to her seemed so relieved; and hoped "Dad and Mum would get some sleep tonight," and Sydney was more than glad she had thought of it.

These and similar incidents filled her days and often kept her at work long after hours. The women who did the actual nursing were far too occupied to answer telephone enquiries; perhaps it was but natural that they should come to regard the patients' relatives as a whole in the light of an unnecessary interruption. Miss Lea, having made this her task, through it probably learned more about the English temperament than she could have acquired in any other way. Particularly she learned not to expect any changes of expression in the faces or voices of these suffering, frightened people trained to woodenness.

Hugh Easterly had rallied a little in a day or two, and his father stopped by the desk in the office with a stately word of thanks for Sydney's considerate message. He asked her a few questions and their conversation freshly surprised him. He did not look for so quick an understanding in a person holding such a position and he returned home meditating on the changes in the world.

"You seem to be rather fortunate in that American young lady," he observed to Sister Lucy, on his way out.

"Miss Lea? Why, we simply couldn't carry on without Miss Lea!" was her answer, which the more impressed Sir Thomas, as Sister Lucy at no time was given to enthusiasm.

CHAPTER VIII

IN one of the pleasantest streets of Mayfair, there is a front door which has lost its house. London is full of houses which have lost their streets and cannot make up their minds whether they really belong to Bedford Gate or to Pelham Terrace. There are streets whose houses have deliberately strayed around the corner; and there are streets so old that they have forgotten their own names after a square or so. Not far from a great Railway Terminal, for example, there stands a row of mansions proclaiming themselves on a black and white signboard as belonging, let us say, to Brant Place; while a similar row exactly opposite on the other side of the street, quite as firmly announces that its address is Sussex Gardens!

The front door we have just noted, in all the glory of its white paint and its brass knocker, has a reckless air of being off on a jaunt of its own. Passers-by, on a foggy afternoon when the lights are lit, can see how the drawing-room of No. 20 extends over it to meet the drawing-room of No. 22, leaving No. 21, as it were, without any *raison d'être*. As a matter of fact, this lonely doorway is a hundred years old and dates back to a little incident before the battle of Waterloo. It is concerned with a young couple, poor, but highly connected, who went off together to make their fortune in the golden East. A son came to them, and following the custom even then, they wept over him and packed him back to English air with an ayah in a sailing-ship, to the care of a gentle, middle-aged cousin who might have been (but wasn't,) Miss Martha Honeyman.

In a year or two, the East had claimed them and they never saw the boy again. By this time, through a series of chances, he had become a rather important boy, although he clung the more closely to that kind adopted mother, that retired elderly lady with whom he spent the holidays. Years came and he grew from a rather important boy into a very important youth indeed, and in due time came into a title and a rent-roll, of all of which his father had never more than dreamed. Among his new acquisitions was a fine, four-square, Georgian town-house having at the back a garden in the good old Mayfair way. And because he was an affectionate boy, he built a little house back of his garden, running its front-door, by means of a tunnel, out beside his own; and put the dear old lady into it that they might be near together. So here, in great content, she lived and died.

Such was the story of her own great-grandfather and his affection for his old relative, which Miss Vio-land told to Sydney Lea on the autumn afternoon when the girl went first, a little diffidently, to seek out her English acquaintance. She was conducted along the panelled tunnel, hung with old prints, by a large, fair, solemn, elderly person in a cap and a tight-waisted stuff dress, of a cut she had never before seen. A small, square hall opened out before them, wherein tapestry hangings, rich in color and old brasses polished into mirror brightness, reflected the glow of the red-firelight. The newel-posts of the steep, twisting staircase were enriched with fine carvings: there was a lacquered cabinet, which would have made an antiquary's mouth water. Sydney only felt that it lent the little place the dignity of an audience chamber. The drawing-room whose windows still looked upon the Baronet's garden, was panelled too in a fine stately design; and was carpeted and curtained and hung in a certain shade of wonder-

ful deep blue only to be found nowadays in older houses.

Miss Violand was sitting by the fire, in front of her laden tea-table, and Sydney noticed that she wore just the same black silk dress with little ruffles, and lengths of gold chain twisted around her neck—as she had done on their first meeting. Otherwise she looked shrunken and aged, and her misty, blue eyes were anxious. She kissed the girl gently.

"So you are staying here to help us," she said. "My dear child, how splendid of you!"

They had a long talk over their tea—which was quite the most substantial meal Sydney had seen in England and included eggs, five sorts of bread, and cake, and three kinds of jam. It was brought in and offered and taken out by the solid person, who gave her opinion freely when asked, and was plaintively addressed by her mistress—to Sydney's vast amusement—by the name of Giddy. Giddy arranged matters according to an immemorial ritual which included placing muffins on the hearth until an exact moment in the ceremony had been reached, when she made Sydney eat them. Giddy also studied the guest and did not leave the room, until she had been, in a manner, introduced. When Miss Violand observed: "This young lady, Giddy, is from the States." Giddy replied "You don't say so, m'!" and regarded the outlander with unaffected interest.

Miss Violand wished to hear all about the hospital and Sydney Lea had the gift of vivid speech, so that she made a veritable picture of the place and its inmates, the ignorant lady-aids in their pearls and high heels, the brave boy-patients, and all the rest. Miss Violand had heard of Sister Lucy: "A fine woman, I am sure," she said, "if not quite a Florence Nightingale."

She asked minutely about Sydney's way of living,

and shook her head over the lodging-house in Bloomsbury, adding vaguely that "of course I really do not know anything about such places." But she was greatly startled, terrified even, when Sydney went on to say, very calmly, that she did not believe she could possibly afford to work all winter at the hospital for nothing.

"Oh my dear, you must not!" she cried, "beggar yourself to help us—that would never do!"

Sydney replied that she supposed they would pay her something when she asked them; and her confident manner caused the vague blue eyes of the elder woman to rest on her with wistful amazement. The girl seemed to carry with her such a fine resiliency and courage that it brought Miss Violand a breath of that outer air of youthful effort which was beginning to blow through the world.

Sydney went back to her dingy room with a warm and renewed sense of home and thereafter she dropped in often at the little, tucked-away house in Mayfair. She came to tell Miss Violand the result of her talk with Sister Lucy, which had been entirely frank. Expenses were mounting up and moreover Mr. Hansell's letters from home had been strongly marked with disapproval. Sydney must be earning a little or she could not stay on, and she did want to stay on. Sister Lucy could not hesitate, she knew that she could never hope to replace Miss Lea. So it was arranged she was to keep her position for the present at a salary of three pounds a week—for which she was to assume longer hours and heavier responsibilities than are generally attached to such a post.

All during October and November the excitement about the Belgian refugees was at its height. English people who had all their lives dwelt behind nine foot walls with glass on the top, suddenly felt com-

elled to open their hearts and houses to the riff-raff of Brussels, with the most unforeseen results. Even Miss Violand could not escape the appeal and tortured herself about her duty toward these unfortunates until she could hardly sleep at night. But as weeks went by, the money situation, followed by the rise in prices and taxes, so much diminished her small income that she began to wonder whether she and Giddy could go on living behind the lost front-door. As for a Belgian family—that was clearly impossible. She talked about it a great deal, though, and very regretfully, at the work-party she attended in St. James Palace; and she talked there also about her young American friend, "such a wonderful child!" living and working so courageously in a strange country.

"Why don't you take her in with you?" suggested, with her usual bluntness, the red-faced Countess of Welden. "It seems to me that would be a great deal more to the point than the Belgian family you are thinking about—for you, I mean."

"I had not even thought of such a thing," Miss Violand replied, truthfully.

"Well, if I were you, I should think of it," Lady Welden paused by the table, gathering the big roll of gauze into her arms. "If the girl is working for us, it's very sporting of her. We ought to do all we can, y'know to keep the Americans in with us. Welden says it may make all the difference . . ." and she turned away, her arms laden, and the scissors clanking by her side.

Miss Violand went home in a state of inward excitement and broached the matter to Giddy. There were few things she did not discuss with Giddy, since they had both been young and slim, thirty years ago. Giddy had been dead set against the idea of a Belgian family "a jabbering lot of none-knows-who,

if I may say so—;” but she had been favorably impressed with Sydney Lea, whom she thought “sweetly pretty” and “quite the lady.” She regarded the whole proposition in the light of an eccentricity of her mistress, born of all this “unsettlement,” but still, if Miss Helen really must harbor a foreigner like the rest of the gentry—it had better be a foreigner whose language one could understand. “And besides, Colonials, they belong to us, like,” was the form in which she gave her final consent.

Miss Violand, thereupon, sent for Sydney. Her manner was impressive, never had a Violand even remotely contemplated such a step; but these were times of change. She felt that she was in the movement; and it cannot be denied that she was a good deal daunted by the matter-of-fact manner in which her young friend received her suggestion. Sydney was certainly both grateful and pleased; the prospect of living behind the lost front-door delighted her, but there was nothing in the least startling or novel about the idea, to her mind. She knew lots of families in New England who found some such arrangement convenient and pleasant, and Miss Violand’s solemnity about it surprised her. She was completely firm, however, that if she came she must pay her way, and she made her reasons so strong that after some protest Miss Violand yielded. There was no doubt that, where the margin was such a narrow one, even this little sum coming in every week made a difference, and gave Miss Violand too, another attitude toward life. She took Lady Welden aside at the next meeting of the work-party, to narrate with all gravity how she had taken her advice; and she was pleased that Lady Welden approved and thought it “a sensible arrangement.”

CHAPTER IX

"OH dear Bess," wrote Sydney to Elizabeth, "I am now all moved and settled into the funniest little room you ever saw. My window has a glimpse of garden and my bath room is a tin tub and a can of hot water. Giddy brings them every morning and tells me that the weather is 'very stuffy' . . . I sleep in a single four-posted bed with red curtains and my room is done in faded blue and red chintz with lovely poll-parrots on the pattern. The whole house is filled with wonderful old furniture and china, which is kept speckless as if it were a museum. The parlor —(I beg its pardon—drawing-room!) is crowded with puffy chairs and Battersea boxes and Staffordshire goats, and silver polished until it shines . . . Miss Violand is a dear and so anxious to like 'the States,' and so are her friends—who look exactly like her. . . . They sit around at tea and ask me things (when I'm there which isn't often,) and they always end up with a sigh and say: 'I suppose your German-American population would rise in a body and massacre everybody—if you were to come in?' And it always puzzles them because I laugh. . . . Giddy is a flawless person, she is a real experience. She has been Miss Violand's housekeeper and maid and cook for years and years and she always calls the King and Queen 'their Majesties.' Notwithstanding her name, she is solid and immovable and perfectly obstinate: and she rules Miss Violand with a rod of iron. She is very bitter against the Kaiser: 'who didn't ought to have had the notice taken of him in the past—as was taken—if I may say so—by her late Gracious Majesty!' She approves of

me because I am working for 'our brave soldiers;' but also I worry her at times by my ways, and because I don't own all the things 'which young ladies should have when in London, if I may say so.' I always hear from Giddy what '*we do*'; and what 'isn't done—leastways in London.' We do wear white gloves it appears: (I don't!) and we don't carry packages: (I do!)—but then much is forgiven 'Colonials,' which she persists in calling me. Giddy doesn't know a word of American. Yesterday it seemed colder; so I asked her 'What's the thermometer?' and she coughed behind her hand and answered, 'I believe Miss, it is an instrument for registering heat and cold!' . . .

"We are desperately busy at the hospital, all the beds are filled—but the telephone works, at last, and my records are in order.

"The volunteers are simply too ignorant for words; and the doctors, (or so it strikes me,) are rather more pompous and self-important than ours at home. They don't like to explain and so the confusion at times is dreadful. I don't see how Sister Lucy stands it: but I begin to realize that if the English had the nerves we have, they would have rid themselves of their muddling habits long ago. They flourish in a chaos which would send an American into an asylum. They seem to take pride in their lack of system; and I rage because the boys suffer unnecessarily. We've had one case here for weeks, that I wish we could ship home! An aeroplane fall—causing a frightful condition, and nobody seems to be able to help him. Do get that nice nerve-specialist cousin of yours to send me over some books or suggestions. The boy suffers terribly. . . . His father comes to see him every day—such a darling old person; and somebody-or-other in Parliament, I believe. Yesterday I thought he was going to faint; but he has

that wonderful self-control they all have and which so often seems mere stodginess. He has lost one son already, and now this poor boy won't see his mother and sister because they were so upset at his suffering. The father just comes and goes with that immovable face: only on *very* bad days he sits awhile in the office and talks a little with me."

Elizabeth answered:

"I never told you in my first letters what a dreadful time I had with Mr. Hansell, my dear. He even called me up on the long-distance telephone to scold me for not bringing you home—as if I could! He raved about siege and starvation and horrors generally until I felt as if I were back in Geneva. You'll have to smooth him down somehow, Syd, or else come home: I can't help wishing it would be the latter. There's lots of work here, if that's what you want, you quixotic creature! Everybody is doing some war work. May Palmer has gotten up a class in social psychiatry and Julia Teiners has taken up occupational therapy: which she tells me is fascinating and very useful for cases of shell-shock. She expects to go out to France later on, attached to the Woman's Hospital Unit. I'm on the Belgian Relief Committee and it takes every minute of my time. . . . Last week, I gave a talk at college, all about our journey, and we made \$300 for the Red Cross.—How's that? You are so clever at all that sort of thing . . . you really ought to come home. There's a great deal of ignorance about the causes of the War, I find, and many people talk as though Germany was beset by a ring of enemies. Very few try to follow the President's example and be really and truly *neutral* . . . Yes: I'll get my cousin to send you some books on these latest treatments for nervous injuries . . . there's a wonderful something or other called the Weisler treatment—which everybody is talking about

and they say is very successful. But what do you know about nerves and shell-shock, my dear? It sounds to me just a little absurd!"

"Wait and see what I know about shell-shock, you dear old thing!" wrote Sydney, "and don't waste any more paper asking me to be neutral—I go in for righteous wrath. You and your busy ladies and your Belgian Relief are all very well, but the only relief for Belgium that I can see is to kill the Germans. And somehow, Bess, I can see a time coming when the United States is going to agree with me."

CHAPTER X

"AND so that dear boy at the hospital who is so bad, is Thomas Easterly's son?" said Miss Violand. Sydney looked up from the life of Disraeli she was reading. The two were sitting by the fire, while the thick stillness of a Mayfair winter evening enfolded them. Far away sounded a taxi-horn, otherwise, as Sydney often reflected, she had known it noisier in a New England forest than here in the heart of a city of seven million people.

"Yes:" she replied, then with grave satisfaction at using a pure Briticism, "he's better—that is, he's not so bad as he was."

"I heard his father once at the House: he spoke very strongly against one of those iniquitous Home Rule measures—when he was quite a young man. He had sound common sense and was not too clever," said Miss Violand tolerantly, giving Sir Thomas the highest praise she knew.

"Certainly he is not too clever . . . and he's very quaint and quite simple . . . I wonder are they all like that?"

"I should hope we all had true simplicity of manner, Sydney . . . but I don't know what else you mean."

"Well, when Sir Thomas says beans—he means beans, that's all—" she broke into laughter at her friend's mystified face and hurried on. "Never mind—it's just my barbarian way of talking . . . I do like Sir Thomas and he likes me, I'm sure, ever since I took him that book on the Weisler treatment for nerve-shock. He showed it to Sir Andrew Spencer, and that Weisler treatment really has done the boy so much good. It has quieted him and he sleeps better

and suffers less. . . . Sir Thomas simply chuckled," Sydney went on, laying aside her book and clasping her hands over her knee, "because, you see, I warned him it would never do to let the surgeon dream who suggested the idea . . . it would set them dead against it. He said I had a head on my shoulders."

"You are very clever, Sydney, but—"

"If you knew Sir Andrew Spencer, dear, you wouldn't wonder at me . . . he thinks he got a title merely for sticking to his own opinion and maybe he did. Anyway, do you think he would have even looked at Weisler's book if he knew who had brought it to his notice? But I coached Sir Thomas—I told him not to mention Hugh or his symptoms—but just always to infer that Sir Andrew knew all about the Weisler treatment and leave the book lying around—on Hugh's bed, if he could work it. . . . Sir Andrew did know the book—that is, the outside of it! So back he came to Sister Lucy, swelling like a turkey-cock and saying 'eh-ah,' he thinks it might be worth while to try that new American treatment on Hugh Easterly . . . that eh . . ah . . Weisler treatment,' you see? So they did. And when the boy got some real sleep—the first time—why, Sir Andrew beamed like the sun. 'Very few practitioners are aware of all these new discoveries!' says he."

Miss Violand smiled, but looked doubtful. She was always afraid of novelty.

"Ever since that day Sir Thomas comes often into the office and looks about," Sydney pursued, "he's interested in my files and records and he gives me tests—'Now, Miss Lea, how quickly can you give me such-and-such information?' Today, I did it for him and a friend in three minutes by his watch, and he was so proud! 'Splendid system, Romeyne, you see!' he said." The name caught Miss Violand's interest.

"Was that Adrian Romeyne, by any chance?"

"That was his name . . . I looked him up in Who's Who at once. He came to see Hugh."

"How interesting—of course, he is a dreadful Liberal—but then I understand he is quite a personage, a rising man. What was he like?"

"Well, he was a real man—not a stuffed shirt. He has big eyes and talks from away 'way up'."

"Good heavens! my child—what expressions!" Miss Violand underwent severe shocks whenever her young friend gave utterance to these candid opinions in picturesque vernacular. This dauntless audacity of youth had not touched her horizon for many years. She looked across at the girl's slender figure with a sense of bewilderment. What sureness of poise they had nowadays, and what energy! Imagine herself at the same age announcing that a prominent member of the Government was "*not a stuffed shirt!*" And then always a book, always study—it was very remarkable.

"I never met Mr. Romeyne—but I believe he is considered to have a political future," she observed.

"He is a man with brains. I liked him," said Sydney serenely: then she continued with her eyes on the coals:—"He said—Mr. Romeyne said, that Disraeli's career was the triumph of intellect over personality and I said that it seemed to me rather the triumph of personality over principle; and he smiled. Then he and Sir Thomas talked a little about politics and Asquith and so on. . . . It was very interesting."

"It must have been, indeed."

"That is a very fascinating world—" the girl went on. "I wonder—if one read and studied a lot, would there be any chance of getting a glimpse of it?"

"How do you mean, my dear?"

"Well, as somebody's secretary for example. I should love it. And I'd work hard."

"No one would employ a girl of your age in such a capacity," was Miss Violand's opinion and Sydney was silenced. Giddy came in to bring her mistress a hot drink, to rake down and cover the fire, and to remark that tomorrow was going to be "a rough day."

Sydney Lea kept her vague dreams to herself thereafter; but in her hospital office she became aware of currents of change which kept her from accepting her elderly friend's convictions. She worked and read and studied; and she was ever conscious of the fuller currents of sympathy and intellectual energy, to which she lent herself. Yet all the while she never lost the sense that individual interests and efforts seemed to be swamped by the collective need of the world, swamped in universal suffering. Pain and death: death and pain: had society any other aspect? She was soon however to behold one: Miss Violand's nephew came home for a short leave. This was the first soldier Sydney had met—in health that is—and holding the normal place in the vast machinery whose vibrations filled the whole world.

Eric Violand was a personable fellow; he was tall and yellow-haired, with grey eyes and a very valuable lack of imagination. He talked about life "out there," somewhat vaguely, and with an apparently deliberate evasion of its dramatic aspects. This Wellingtonian tradition of the British military attitude was very prevalent that first winter—when the whole army repeated the Duke's famous remark "By God, it would not have done if I had not been there!" Eric was exactly like that: he answered "Oh yes!" and "quite so" and "rather," to his aunt's questions; he spoke respectfully of the enemy and so-so about the

Belgians. Already, in those few tremendous months, the affair had come to wear in his mind the familiar countenance of duty—rousing neither enthusiasm nor dislike—; already, the horror and strain and danger had become a humdrum natural part of life,—already he welcomed a turn of the talk toward other subjects. Sydney Lea termed him inwardly “Peter Bell” and marvelled at him. Bovine,—animal—were they merely? And yet splendid—the saviours of the world!

Miss Violand’s eyes were full of affection when she looked at her dear boy. He on his part, surveyed the new inmate of his aunt’s house with approval, though with no idea of what was really passing beyond what he called the “ripping” eyes of this young lady. He went on to talk, gayly and simply, of France and his amusements when at rest “behind the lines” and from there to the subject of the United States concerning which his ignorance was naif and profound.

“You people are really wonderful,” he remarked. “Do you mean to say that you decided to stay in England merely because you were interested?”

“I am quite alone, you see,” she answered; “there is nobody really to care. It meant a change of work —nothing more.”

“Well—its magnificent—so I think and so does Aunt Nelly. Of course we know, in France what the Americans are doing. I wish the Huns would stir up that wasp’s nest—and no doubt they will.

“ . . . But, I say, aren’t we going to the play?”

The three of them set forth in high spirits to the theatre. Miss Violand sat silent and content. Sydney noticed that she had added a collar and cuffs of fine ivory lace to her black silk dress—which she wore with a persistency unknown to the American woman,

and also had twisted a third gold chain around her neck in honor of the occasion.

London's darkness during the first winter was nothing to what it became later, but the streets presented a marked contrast to the time Eric had last beheld them, and one of which he greatly disapproved.

"What do they think is going to happen?" he said scornfully. "I call it shameful—letting the enemy see how his threats affect us."

The musical comedy greatly pleased him and some score of other young officers like him; and during the entr'acte he chatted with Miss Lea.

"It's a very great departure for Aunt Nelly to have asked you to stay with her," he observed reflectively. "She has always been to me just a delicious bit of Victorian bric-a-brac stuck away in Mayfair."

"And I am the bull in the china-shop?"

"Not at all. You seem to fit in jolly well. But it's true she never was one to go in for Americans," he rejoined, with characteristic frankness.

"I say, Aunt Nelly, she's a ripper—your young lady," he said to his aunt next afternoon over their tea; "and a good sort, I should think."

"Sydney is a dear, and with all her independent American ways—quite startling though they are to me sometimes—yet she usually does the right thing and she is truly devoted to the Allies," said Miss Violand, much gratified. Her nephew, whose vocabulary was as limited as is usual with his type, repeated that Sydney was a "good sort."

"I'm so glad you approve, darling" his aunt continued in a burst of confidence. "I was worried about taking such a step, at first, but then everyone was doing something of the kind and Lady Welden advised me very strongly. Somehow, I couldn't bring

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myself to take in a Belgian family—the language and all that. If one must take in a foreigner, this seemed so much better!"

"I should rather say so," her nephew replied shortly, and changed the subject.

CHAPTER XI

"AND what did you think of the House?" asked Sir Thomas Easterly.

The month was March, with a pale sky, frost, and a nipping wind. Sir Thomas had paused for a moment in the office as his way often was before going home. He stood, square-faced and ample, in front of the fireplace and directly interrogated the young lady at the desk.

"Well—it seemed to me on the whole," she answered him slowly, "to be rather—lacking in distinction."

Sir Thomas chuckled. He was given to these direct questions and apt to chuckle at her answers.

"Quite so—quite right—so it is. The Liberals take 'em as a body, have energy but no knowledge of war. We have the knowledge—some of us!—but no energy. We stick in the mire of tradition; while they splash their ignorance over the nation."

"But Mr. Asquith, surely?"

"No party can get along on one man's brains, in war time. Besides—you know what my friend Romayne said about the P.M.? That he had all the qualities of a great statesman, except resolution—whereas Lloyd George had none of the qualities of a great statesman—except resolution!"

Miss Lea smiled appreciatively, and as Sir Thomas moved toward the door, she asked after his son.

"Hugh is infinitely better—thanks to all of you here and in particular to you, Miss Lea. The way you handled Spencer over that Weisler treatment was wonderful. I know Spencer—clever fellow—

but vainer than a peacock and never accepts anybody else's ideas on principle. How did you do it?"

"Oh, just a little indirect suggestion," said Sydney gravely, but her eyes laughed.

"Well—now we shall get the boy down in the country, they tell me, by another fortnight. I left him reading and quite comfortable—and they even hope to get him on his feet again one of these days."

"I'm awfully glad," said the girl warmly and turned once more to her work. But her share in poor Hugh's improvement stuck in his father's mind as he put his latchkey into the door at Charles Street, and he spoke to his wife about it. His account of this young ally interested Ada Easterly a good deal; so she and Janey dropped in one afternoon and said a kind word to the young secretary. Her appearance, tall, pale and quiet, favorably impressed them, and undoubtedly also the fact she was staying with Miss Violand,—which Lady Easterly quite frankly, if not bluntly, ascertained by direct questions—had its effect. Yet it is perfectly true that when she asked Sydney to tea, Lady Easterly was influenced almost wholly by the profound changes in the status of the individual which the War had brought about—and which had suddenly cast down as by machine guns—the barbed-wire barriers of centuries.

Sydney went—thought they were very kind and pleasant and thought little more about it. What did interest her, was the appearance at tea of Mrs. Romeyne—to whom Lady Easterly felt conscientiously obliged to pay some sort of periodical attention. Sydney sat very quietly in her corner, and looked at Mrs. Romeyne; and wondered what hidden streak of vulgarity there must be in the man with the big eyes which could have responded to this creature. She did, of course, like all Americans, base her conceptions of marriage on love. Of the

other motives which might exist for it—she had no idea whatever. She had no estimate of the influence which might lead a brilliant man, hampered in that great world for means with which to push his ambition, to marry a totally unsuitable woman for that reason: and still less had Sydney any knowledge of those underlying assumptions of English society, which exist to mitigate, for any man who makes such a marriage, its worst results. In her scheme of things, all marriage meant an intimacy which if unpleasant might be terminated by divorce—but which, while it existed, deprived either one of the sufferers from a similar intimacy with anyone else. The fact that for some centuries marriage—for the man at least—in England has been granted an amelioration in fact, which it has been hard to secure by law—is a very startling circumstance to a young provincial. So Sydney sat and regarded Mrs. Romeyne's purple and scarlet frock and henna-tinted hair with philosophic and very naive reflections. She also regarded Janey—who though nearly her own age and evidently very capable and busy, seemed to her like a being from another sphere. Janey was tall and rather clumsy in build, her round, rosy face and large placid eyes had little beauty, though set in a mass of wonderful copper-brown hair. She spoiled the effect of her plain, useful frock by adding one color too much, purple for choice, and she was singularly lacking in grace or graciousness. Yet Sydney felt strongly that there lay a real charm in her direct frankness.

Meanwhile, Janey in her turn was studying the guest—deciding that she was lovely looking—with that pale face and dark hair, and that she dressed vaguely well and that she had an astonishing assurance of manner. Were Americans always so much at ease? Of course nowadays one took people more

or less at their own valuation, but this "Princess in disguise" bearing was the last she had expected.

Sydney's absence of class consciousness stood her in good stead in their encounters in a new world. Since she herself was aware of no social difference between her own position and that of these kind people—they also ceased to be aware of it. The fact that she worked for her living had not made her unsure. But all this might have counted less with her hostess than the strange combination in Sydney's personality at this time—of qualities both sexless and feminine. An English mother of sons is quick to detect signs of the predatory woman—for whom she is especially apt to look in the ranks of the typist, or the trained nurse—and of whom she is brought up to beware. In Lady Easterly this suspicion was counteracted by great natural kindness, as by the absence of Middleton in France. But it existed nevertheless; it caused her to watch the girl narrowly—under cover of her talk with Mrs. Romeyne, and what she saw pleased her and warmed her interest. She bade Sydney good-bye with cordiality; hoped they would see her again, thanked her heartily for her part in the boy's improvement, and sent her out into the empty world with a new and pleasant sense of friendliness.

At the end of the month Eric Violand came home on a few days' leave, and showed very plainly the attraction which his aunt's guest had come to have for him. Those long and bitter weeks in the trenches, during which imagination had furnished the only relief, had brought him many pictures of Sydney sitting by the fire with the light on her shadowy hair, or coming in, from the black streets with her swift step and her smile—to narrate with vivid speech and gesture, the little encounters of her day.

At first, he met her with the shy stiffness and caution which is habitual to an Englishman whenever

he is conscious of any heightened feeling. This caution has been evolved as a means of self-defence among an inflammable race and one whose mating instinct is less idealized than in certain other societies. Moreover, in these tense war-times, emotions were easily roused and quickly killed; men snatched at happiness under the very wings of the dark angel and no man's wedding-feast escaped the death's head. Those desperate issues which were being fought out on the front had brought a heightening of all primitive impulses—had turned the balance in favour of the animal. Hence—just as Boccaccio pointed out many centuries before—, there had arisen sudden matings and sudden dissensions—swift and evanescent passions: love affairs that had a fatal lack of permanency or seriousness; and were often carried to fruition with an extraordinary cynicism. Young people met and married on the wave of pity or of high heroic feeling; flirtations flamed up suddenly into passions, which died out after a brief indulgence and left only wreck behind. The current of tension and of suffering with which society as a whole was charged; drew its atoms irresistibly together in connections as capricious as brief and the elder world no longer seemed to have the power, as heretofore, to punish the wrong-doer by its frown.

Young Eric Violand was of course quite unaware of the forces which drew him to the stranger and was very distrustful and decidedly reserved. But the girl herself was so frank and gay and she met him with such a comradely unconsciousness that this could not long continue. It soon gave way indeed to bewilderment at her way of treating his advances: for she took quite as a matter of course the small attentions which to an English girl would have seemed full of significance.

“Why, I almost as good as proposed last night—

But she never seems even to see it!" thought the young man discontentedly and with a feeling of wonder.

"You don't appear very glad to see a fellow on leave," he remarked.

"You are interfering with my work," she replied severely. This was at the hospital, where Eric had dropped in to suggest a walk in the park before tea.

"Well, I can't see why you should kill yourself. Besides you ought to do something for a chap on his leave."

"There are loads of people quite ready to do that, it seems," Sydney answered severely; "there's Miss Guest."

Miss Guest was the daughter of a neighboring magnate to whom the War furnished a justification for her more predatory instincts and who exercised them unblushingly. She bobbed her hair and wore a uniform and came to the hospital to walk out with the convalescents and there her activities ceased. To Sister Lucy and those strained, devoted women whose days and nights were one long fight against suffering in its bitterest form, she was a torment and a reproach.

"I don't know Miss Guest and I don't want to know her," replied Eric doggedly and he did not move.

Sydney turned away from him to her telephone. She answered the enquiry of some anxious person who found her American intonation hard to hear clearly and resented the fact; when that was done, she sent another message on her own account. Sister Lucy appeared in the doorway, with a crisp—

"Miss Lea—that last iodine. . . . when did we get it and from whom?" And Sydney was at her files in an instant and her reply:

"March 3rd—Burroughs and Wellcome" was as

crisp as Sister Lucy's. There was nothing to do for the young officer but to take his leave and he did so, comforted perhaps by the kindness of her glance. At the same time, he reflected, walking slowly homeward —there was no reason to be so business-like as all that. The women were a great help no doubt but this independent manner about it he vaguely resented.

Sydney was very nice to him when she came home that evening, and at dinner she told them how much better Hugh Easterly was, and that Sir Thomas had dropped in to tell her how the boy enjoyed being at Easterly Park and to give her the name of a book on the history of political parties.

"What in the world—?" Eric asked. "You're hardly likely to need that information."

"That or any other information," she replied gaily. "I have my ambitions—I'm not going to stay on at the hospital all my life."

"I should say not!" Eric's view was that women were doing magnificent work during the War, but that as soon as the War was over they should be invited in quite unmistakable terms, to step back into the shelter of the home; "but I don't quite see—as you're not a suffragette, are you? what you would have to do with politics."

"Women in this country seem to have a lot to do with them. I'd like to work for awhile in a Government bureau and see how it's run."

Eric laughed with the least touch of patronage.

"To release a man for the Front, is the proper expression nowadays," he said. "I don't deny that you could do it and very well, too. But honestly now, wouldn't it be chiefly the excitement that attracted you?"

"What attracts me is the work," she answered simply. Eric did not understand this.

"But—what sort of work?" he persisted.

"Head work—for instance—don't you think I might make a good secretary to a political man or a Cabinet Minister or something really important, like that?"

She spoke playfully and yet seriously, appealing to Miss Violand, who looked perplexed.

"They always seem to have elderly men for that position," she observed doubtfully.

"Doddering old chaps—with one foot in the grave," said her nephew cheerfully.

"What would Mr. Lloyd George or Mr. Bonar Law be doing with a lovely young lady secretary from the States?"

Sydney smiled. "But I never thought of them. . . . There was one man whose secretary I'd love to be."

"Who's that—Asquith?"

"Don't be absurd—no. Mr. Adrian Romeyne."

"Personally, one of these politicians is just as much a name to me as another," remarked the young man, with true military condescension.

CHAPTER XII

THAT remarkable man, Adrian Romeyne, later to be known as Lord Waveney, was forty-five or thereabouts at the beginning of the War. He was a man quite unknown to the public, nor had he up to this time held any salient post which would have been likely to increase their knowledge. When he received the appointment he now held—a minor but important position in the Foreign Office—the world knew of him only as a useful person of large experience and of unusual judgment and initiative. But he was more than this. No one who threaded that complex political maze of the years 1914-1917 but was constantly being reminded of the existence of Adrian Romeyne. His influence was never merely taken for granted. There was hardly one of His Majesty's Government Offices—whether the War Office or the Admiralty, whether the Home Office or the Colonial, without some important functionary who owed his situation there directly or indirectly, to Romeyne. There were few of the big men—and this was a fact independent of party, who, at one time or another, had not been under an obligation to him. Long before he was ever made a Privy Councillor, it might have been truly said that he headed a small Privy Council of his own. He was not a Cabinet Minister but he was often present at Cabinet meetings, and he never missed those small private gatherings of four or five or six men at Sir Edward Grey's house or the P.M.'s—where things were talked over and determined in freedom; and moreover on such occasions, it was usually his mind that gave the guiding touch. And if it were *not*, if Romeyne's judgment

were overruled and if hesitation and procrastination carried the day, the result was generally unfortunate enough to heighten his power on the next occasion. The delicate and intricate ramifications of his influence spread in a fine web through the Banks and the Bench and the Board of Trade; it was felt in neutral countries and it was dreaded by the enemy. He was indeed a master diplomat, his manner was at once authoritative and persuasive; and when he fixed those large, calm eyes on one—one became convinced that his suggestion was the only course possible. Much of his power was due to the fact that he had an infallible instinct for success, that he never wasted a second of his time on a lost cause and never used his influence except where that investment was likely to increase his capital. He was no idealist but neither was he a cynic. His genius lay in making people think that what he wanted them to do was what they most desired themselves and he was a consummate master of the obscure and difficult art of psychological suggestion. If there was a Swedish Minister whose *amour propre* must be soothed, (the Swedes were a terrible problem for the Allies during these years,) an Irish Bishop to be conciliated, a big man from the Colonies or the States to be made to feel his importance—the person appointed to the task was almost always Adrian Romeyne. He stood in the centre of all the antagonisms and clashing social interests which the War had created, and he seemed to know instinctively how to reconcile them, how to get men of opposite parties to pull together, and how to bring in touch the elder aristocratic body with the new powers which the Government had, reluctantly enough, called into being.

That he did not accomplish more during these years was due to the fact that he was only one man and that the Philistines were many. One man to be

intelligent and clear sighted where hundreds were stupid and purblind; one man to be firm and calm where thousands were nervous and fidgety; one man to persuade, to conciliate a neutral country into friendship, while all the rest, blatant with arrogance and self-importance, were piling up enmities against themselves and their Government. One man who walked free of muddle and whose imagination fore-saw a world existing after 1915—while the entire political system of the country based itself on and legislated for a time no further than week after next! No: one man was not enough, and, but for the fact that with Romeyne serene philosophy took the place of cynicism or depression, he could never have taken heart for that Sisyphean task.

“They have the idea,” he told his friend Easterly, —“they have the idea—of passing a measure which will carry on and pacify the public until next Monday—and then on Monday they will pass another to carry them till Thursday—and so following.”

“Swine!” muttered his irritated friend, but Adrian never smiled.

“Not swine—sheep,” he said gently, and then after a pause again to speak in that manner of quasi Olympian detachment, which was so characteristic.

“This morning I had to go to see that traitor—Anstyce—”

“But, Romeyne, is he really—”

“Anstyce is not a member of the Government and so he made a prophecy that the Government will fall. And as he has made a prophecy that the Government will fall, he is anxious to see his prophecy fulfilled. And as he wishes his prophecy to be fulfilled, so he wishes the Government not to succeed in winning the War. And as he wishes the Government to fail in winning the War—then he is a traitor.”

"You put it with a deadly clarity. I know the man and of course he does not think he is disloyal."

"He does not think at all: his mind is filled with his own importance to the exclusion of all thought. Being so self-important only an equal self-importance can make any impression on his mind. And the only self-importance equal to his today is Germany's. But one could forgive that—one could forgive that. What one cannot forgive is the lack of faith. He and his clique spend all their days in terrified rushing to and fro to spread panic and distrust. You know how they go on?"

"I know."

"We cannot have conscription—labour won't stand for it—nor Home Rule—Ulster won't stand for it—nor Nationalism—the Sinn Fein won't stand for it; nor Indian troops in Mesopotamia—the Mohammedans won't stand for it. And the sum of all these negations is zero."

"And what can we do about it?"

"That takes reflection," said Adrian, using his pet formula and in this case repeating it, before he changed the subject: "that takes reflection—. How does Hugh go on?"

"Infinitely better, thank God! It will be a long pull, but we have hopes at last. That new American treatment for nerve-shock has done wonders in his case. He sleeps now; has gained weight and his manner is natural once more."

"You were lucky in your Vet. As a rule they are not partial to foreign treatments."

"We don't owe it to Spencer at all—though he does not know it," and Sir Thomas proudly told the story of the management of Sir Andrew. It interested Romeyne.

"You mean that tall, pale, quick girl who was in the Hospital Office the day I went in to see Hugh?

I seem to remember." As a matter of fact, he never forgot anyone. "She must have a head on her shoulders."

Sir Thomas heartily agreed. "She's very clever. They are wonderful those people in some ways—badly as I think they are behaving just now. But this young lady. . . . The other day I dropped in on Hugh just before a debate and she heard me say that I wished there had been time to get up some incidents and analogies from speeches in Parliament during the Franco-Prussian War. No more than that —y' understand? Just that mere suggestion. The next day she handed me this." He laid a typewritten sheet before Romeyne, who examined it.

"Remarkable, very remarkable—and in the exact type and arrangement to catch the eye quickly . . . in requisite order, too," he observed, returning the paper to its owner.

"If Bolder had had half that system and reading I should be lucky," Sir Thomas said regretfully—"the fellow seems to be of no use at all—and now he's going to join up—and I must be looking for another muddler."

"But why? It seems to me you need look no further," Romeyne rose and picked up his hat and stick.

"But surely you can't mean——."

"After that slip you've just showed me? My dear chap—I'd jump at it. The good secretary is born, not made."

"But a woman ——!"

"Pooh, pooh, Easterly, in these days!"

"And an American besides—surely people would talk—for my work it would never do."

"I can't see why not. An American who stays on here to work for the cause is hardly a neutral. And apart from that—apart from that, it might be very

useful. I should think of it, if I were you—I should think of it."

Romeyne left his friend's house and turned his steps toward Berkeley Square. It was late April; the first green hung like a mist over the trees, but the air was raw and the sky full of watery clouds. As he walked on in his absorbed way, that large engine his mind moved steadily on in its task of sorting and measuring, of generalizing and planning. But as he knew, there was a little place outside the engine-room where his spirit often rested, and this afternoon it took pleasure in the young buds and in the coming of Spring. His thoughts began to play about the conversation he just had and that led him to comparisons between the woman who helped and the woman who hindered—between the woman who understood and the woman who didn't. Astonishing, that he of all men should have failed to realize the importance and extent of this difference—and should have placed mere money, and what he supposed to be docility, above it. Were such talents as those of this casual young American really so rare that he could not have hoped to secure something like them in his own wife? He drew a sharp breath, pricked by a renewed consciousness of stupidity and failure; for Romeyne knew perfectly well that there is small excuse for marrying the wrong woman.

In his case the choice had been largely the result of his early surroundings. His father had been a hard-working Q. C. and his mother had died too early for him to have had any ideal of home life whatever. His had been a boyhood of schools and he knew not what to look for in a home—except money and means to push a political career. With a failure of judgment, which was the more extraordinary because it happened so seldom, he had married the first eligible girl for whom he had felt any inclination and

who seemed likely to assist his fortunes. It was a casual mating and was punished as such are punished. Romeyne's wife turned out to be as stupid as a sheep and as obstinate as a mule—it mattered little that she was also a loyal wife, for she was neither a pleasant nor a helpful one. Romeyne spent two very trying years during which he gave her every chance, and then, quite characteristically, he detached himself, as it were, from the whole business; gave it up as a frank failure and summoned to his relief that routine which English society has created to handle these little situations. Divorce in that country being difficult, separation is proportionately easy, and the large size and comfortable plan of English houses makes it both dignified and convenient. Romeyne and his wife met perhaps twice or thrice a week: at slightly longer intervals they had quite amicable business interviews and there it ended. The situation was by no means unique; Romeyne had a friend who went and drank tea most politely with his wife and daughter every month or so. Life being so individually ordered, poverty is the only *raison d'être* for divorce. Romeyne knew that his wife was too dull to suffer and that the position he gave her was compensation sufficient. For himself, he had suffered very much and he would suffer again; but he was not only rather too fastidious to take the passing consolation, but more and more he had come to rely upon his equipoise, his serenity: he was not going to risk these by any love-affair. It pleased him to feel that women were not in the least necessary to him either sensually or spiritually; and now that the War had come, every energy of his being had been absorbed in it and many fresh ones created. He had put that whole part of life as contemptuously on one side, as if he had been an ascetic—which he was not in the least. So, in his own serene manner, he was by no means discontented, except per-

haps on such a spring day as this, when the buds were green and swollen and he had just heard something to suggest the "might-have-beens." As it so often happened where Romeyne was concerned, he had let drop an idea which was later to bear fruit. Sir Thomas Easterly went to the next Debate in the House with the slips which Sydney Lea had typewritten for him, in his vest pocket; and he was congratulated on the vigour and aptness of some of his points, on the pertinency of his examples. He came home in better spirits than for some weeks and his cheery face brought a smile into that of his son when he went down into the country for the week-end.

When Sir Thomas got back to Charles Street on the Monday, it was to face an accumulated muddle left by Bolder, plus a layer of fresh work and unread reports on the top of it, the very look of which struck him with dismay.

"I've never had this place kept in decent order since old Wilton died," was his inward comment; "and now what is to be done?"

Sir Thomas was a Conservative by temperament as by conviction and such men do not change their convictions in a hurry. But he was in desperate need; and he had never yet found it a mistake to follow out any suggestion made by his friend Romeyne. What he did was to compromise. He called up Sister Lucy on the telephone and begged the loan of that clever Miss Lea for a few days—"just to get things straightened out a bit—and until I get a regular secretary—if is not inconvenient, that is."

It was inconvenient, of course, and Sister Lucy knew very well what it meant. But one cannot lightly refuse the Sir Thomas's of this world, at least not while there are so many things needed for one's hospital. Moreover she liked her young assistant and she had seen that the girl was getting a little restless.

"It is the sort of work she ought to do," Sister Lucy reflected, as she hastened from bed to bed. So she called Sydney and told her—and had she not been Sister Lucy, she would have laughed when she saw the gleam in the girl's eyes.

"Don't forget to call him Sir Thomas and not Sir Easterly," she said very seriously and smiled when Sydney replied, "I assure you I've not studied the Peerage for nothing!"

The next night Sydney wrote to Elizabeth:

"Do you know, I feel just like the Duke's daughter who became chauffeur to a Cabinet Minister. 'You must remember to call me my Lord,' said he, very sharply; and the story is that she replied: 'Certainly; and you will remember to call me, my Lady.' . . . I have had the most awful day—like the first chapter of Genesis—but oh Bess, I feel sure that I am going to love it!"



BOOK III
ADVENTURE



CHAPTER XIII

SYDNEY did not leave her work at the Easterly house when those few days were ended. Sir Thomas capitulated. He had seen order created out of chaos, sluggishness give place to activity; consummate tact ruled his engagements, he had not been so comfortable in years. The new secretary was inexperienced, of course; there were quaint mistakes at first. It takes time to learn the intricate formulae by which this social order has been determined since the Middle Ages, and whose knowledge is requisite to the understanding of its complicated evolution both of classes and persons. Sydney must learn the distinction between Lady Jones, *the* Lady Jones and the Hon. Lady Jones; the difference between the two Lords Curzon, between Lord Grey and Sir Edward. There clung to her in the beginning, a certain attitude of amused detachment toward these questions, which her employer found novel and distrusted. But this mattered little because Romeyne was right; she was a born secretary and the technique of her profession, its traditions and details, were very quickly learned.

Sir Thomas could only be thankful to have on hand someone who did not need to be told the spelling of "hegira" or the meaning of "apocalyptic"; who used *in se*, or *per contra* correctly; who took only an hour for luncheon and fifteen minutes for tea; whose smile made his own tardiness or hastes less noticeable to his constituents; who had read Morley's Life of Gladstone and Greville's Diary; and of whom one rarely asked a date or a quotation in vain. His notes for the House were handed him

each afternoon arrayed for instant reference, in different types and on slips cut to fit his pocket and his hand. Never had he been better equipped, and moreover a subtle feminine appreciation governed his days and contributed to his well-being. He threw: he took on several new Committees, and the resourceful Miss Lea was kept busy obtaining statistics of sugar-crops or investigating the dossiers of interned enemy aliens. She worked early and she read late; she studied movements and Blue-books; she formed her own opinion of leading personages. She had an infallible flair for the tendencies of the Press. When she said "There is an important speech by Senator Lodge in the *Daily Telegraph*, Sir Thomas," or "Colonel Repington in today's *Times* is less suggestive than usual," her employer knew that he must read the one and need not read the other. But above all she was faithful and tactful, and on fidelity and tact much of a political career depends. Sydney never let in the wrong man; she never mistook a Labour Member for the plumber. In a remarkably short time she came to know various personal idiosyncrasies—that Adrian Romeyne never talked over the telephone, and that another of Sir Thomas's intimates, on the contrary, had not written a note since that instrument had been available. She knew one prominent M. P. who always said: "We Hamiltons *never* take a 'bus!'", and the other prominent M. P. who had equally strong reasons for never taking a taxi. She knew that the old gentleman who wore a black satin stock and lace-ruffles was *not* a moving-picture actor, but a functionary in the House of Lords. She knew that the other old gentleman who wore a white high hat and sat in a victoria on Charles Street, holding an umbrella over his head as a shield against the first pallid rays of spring sunshine, was not a valetudinarian, but a remarkably hardy and

hard-working member of the Cabinet. She came to know the Red Cross Peeress from the Dancing or Tableau Peeress; the lady who begged Sir Thomas's contribution to a fund to teach the people how to cook rice, from the lady who offered to introduce him to the spirit of his dead son in a séance.

It is not to be surprised that our heroine justified herself in her new position before some weeks had past. There had been opposition on Lady Easterly's part, to the choice of a woman secretary. She felt it to be undignified and complained that it made her house look like the Ministry of Shipping. Also she still retained a dread of the predatory woman—somewhat intensified, in the present case by the fact that the woman was an American and attractive.

"She's a quiet, good girl, I can see," she protested, "but everybody knows what these Americans are. I told Adrian that people from the States tell me its impossible to keep that kind of a girl in her place."

"And he answered . . . ?"

"That it depended on where the place was and it seemed usually to be the Peerage!"

"Now, Ada, do be reasonable. You have seen for yourself what Miss Lea is like. Personally, I've never seen a young person so . . . so entirely devoid of selfconsciousness or coquetry. She is simply clever and competent and very useful to me."

"But the boys, my dear!"

"Hugh is at Easterly, isn't he? And how much time is Mid. likely to have on leave to philander with my secretary?" argued Sir Thomas, and his wife seeing his earnestness, was shaken. Certainly, it was a great thing to have his affairs so well run, and he looked undoubtedly the better for it. She would just have an eye on Miss Lea and see how it went. From time to time, she dropped into the office unawares, always with her kind smile and watch-

ful eyes, to see if Miss Lea was comfortable, as she said—or to suggest that if the day was very bad she would send in the tea. But she never found anything to alarm her. Sydney's manner toward her employer was all his wife could have asked and during his absences she seemed so very busy—the type-writer sounded steadily; and the girl sitting before it merely turned toward Lady Easterly a friendly and preoccupied smile. So different from Bolder, idly lounging about the room with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth! So Lady Easterly's nervousness vanished, and it was only now and then when she caught glimpses of the fact that the secretary did not regard herself *au fond* as in any different class socially from her employers, that she felt a return of uneasiness.

The room where Sydney lived and worked was on the left hand of the front door. It was large and square with two big windows on the street and warmed by a coal-fire, which left always a trace of sooty smell in the air. This was surrounded by a high sitting fender on which Sir Thomas's friends were wont to perch like birds on a wire. There were large, high bookcases filled with pamphlets and reports—all now catalogued in neat rows. The walls were hung with a miscellany of old prints, signed portraits, snap-shots of pet horses and cartoons of the past political events. The Secretary's desk and type-writer and telephone stood between the windows. There were big leather chairs, in one of which Sir Thomas sat while he dictated, unless he called his secretary into the inner room—his library, where his own desk and books were kept and which opened into the "office" by double doors.

Beyond these two rooms Sydney rarely penetrated. She had an impression of a vast house full of spacious chambers—a dining-room with dark paintings

and shining silver; a drawing-room with photographs signed "Maud" or "Alexandra," full of flowers and amazingly quiet. The quiet of the whole house was wonderful to her after the hospital—the servants repressed steps and voices, the subdued exit and entrance of many persons on many errands. All that summer of 1915—the family spent most of their time at Easterly Park with Hugh; but their comings and goings in London were always accomplished in a sort of low-toned and orderly tranquillity.

The master of the house, however, was not able to take any holiday beyond an occasional week-end; and his secretary never missed a day at the office, feeling her new responsibilities, feeling as well those currents which vibrated through Charles Street and whose source was in Flanders or in France. Their fascination and horror gripped her; she felt that only by hard, necessary work would she be able to keep her head—for these were days in which an awful incredulity descended upon men and women alike—when they saw the Gods of things as they are—Gods to which they had entrusted their lives—suddenly start mauling their civilization into pieces. This mauling was something at which one must not look, if one was to keep one's hope, one's sanity. Therefore, Sydney concentrated her thoughts upon the daily task, and on the rather complicated routine it necessitated.

During this summer she first tasted one keen pleasure. She came to know Town; to know her London; to take recondite joy in the atmosphere of this most reticent of cities. London gives its charm, its excitement little by little; but to those who read, it soon becomes the only possible place to live. Sydney had read; she soon found that spiritually she was a born Londoner. At a chance name on a sign-board, something within her thrilled in welcome. All

the different quarters, each with its own marked individuality, Chelsea, retired within its blue mists; the City, with its roaring streets, sharp lights and black shadows,—power streaming through it swift and terrible, as water pours over Niagara; Mayfair, touched with wealth and stateliness, though wearing these today with an air of apology; the parks, crowded in all their open spaces, above them a pale, wide sky, blown upon with faint clouds; Soho, sinister and romantic—at once sordid and gay,—all these she came to know and love. She took a never-ending pleasure in the tiny, independent shops, each subsisting by a few old customers and suspicious of any new. Above all was she awed by, and conscious of that enormous reserve power, that stable and enduring mass which strengthened the whole vast community, which meant the Empire. This was the burden of that Babylon, as it was beheld of the prophet; and there were moments when, as she hurried through the restless and swollen streets, she recalled the wild words of the prophecy, and shivered. Was this also to pass? Was it “to become heaps?” as in the old poet’s words, or “one with Nineveh and Tyre,” as in the words of the new? The very confidence, the very steadfastness of the people, their refusal to be shaken or to be alarmed or be worried or to be changed—held at times for her, a certain doubt and terror.

Such thoughts and feelings brought with them a new sensitiveness and a new quickening of the spirit.

Outwardly, the days moved steadily one after the other, warm and still. Miss Violand paid her usual visit to Yorkshire leaving Giddy in charge of Miss Lea; to the latter’s profit and delight. Giddy by this time had adopted the American girl into the family, with all the scoldings and cossetings which that adoption implied. Both she and her mistress

had been much impressed with the heightened consequence of Sydney's new position in the world.

"It is amazing, mem," as Giddy said "what young ladies will be doing with themselves!" And Miss Violand agreed that it was indeed amazing. She regarded her young guest with new eyes; asked her opinion of political events and heard the chance rumours which eddied through the corridors of Westminster Hall, with a respectful attention.

Nor did she resent it, as she might once have done, when her nephew began to pay the American girl somewhat decided attention, even though Miss Violand could not forget that earlier in his career, young Eric had made a markedly unsuccessful attempt to fill a position similar to the one Sydney was now holding. The girl did not suffer by comparison, and Miss Violand was not unwilling when she went about with the boy a little and met some of his friends. One of these was a handsome girl named Hilda Fredericks who interested Sydney because she was a musician, had her memory well filled with poetry, and seemed altogether cultivated and charming. Some weeks after young Violand had returned to the Front, Miss Fredericks made Sydney a visit, during which she talked very graciously; and soon afterwards there came from her an invitation to dinner.

CHAPTER XIV

SIR JACOB and Lady Fredericks lived in Portland Place, fairly near to Regent's Park, and thither Sydney found her way on the appointed evening. A subdued Orientalism made itself felt in the decorations; there was a drawing-room done in the Moorish manner, with doorways copied after the Alhambra, the effect somewhat marred by the introduction of obese blue satin furniture. There was a marble hall filled with artificial plants; and the newel-post was a Moor of carved ebony, dressed in silver and holding an electric light. On either side of the dining-room door there were stands of stuffed pheasants under glass, with a plate bearing the inscription that they had been shot and presented to the owner of the house by the late monarch Edward VII. Sydney was to learn, as she went on, very much to the credit of that tactful sovereign, whose habit it was to leave such relics of himself among many similar families. Was it his association with Royalty which made Sir Jacob so *very* guttural? Such things had been. A certain waving gesture of Queen Alexandra's has been adopted by hosts of elderly ladies wearing tangled auburn fringes and dog-collars of jet or diamonds, as their means permitted. Sir Jacob wore his greyish beard trimmed to a point: he had small, twinkling, very shrewd eyes under drooping lids, and he chatted to the girl who sat beside him at dinner, with childlike bonhomie and overflowing kindness. The dinner was Edwardian: there was lace and pink ribbon and pink candles on the table and the food came in on a series of little objects, like a collection at a museum. When you thought you had made an

end with pudding, you were daunted by an ice in a little cup; and when that was over you, apparently, took a fresh start with some hot grated ham. Although the party consisted only of one other guest besides herself, her host, his wife and family, yet they solemnly entered the dining-room in procession and the little dabs of food pursued their appointed path into eight or nine courses and were served by a butler named Beresford and a footman named Wilhelm. Then the cloth was removed and cigars and liqueurs brought for the gentlemen, while the ladies retired to music in the drawing-room "all in the good old English way," as Sir Jacob put it.

During dinner he talked about the War and his own patriotic views thereon; shooting at the secretary, now and again, little questions which vaguely irritated her. "Sir Thomas must be very busy these days. Had he much trouble with these dangerous aliens? . . . It was indeed a pity that England had ever allowed herself to be dragged into Continental quarrels. England for the English—is my dictum! If I could, I would build a ten foot wall around the whole Island—already—" and so on.

These were the days when England regarded the Germans in her midst as one regards a friend whose mother has suddenly developed homicidal mania—that is to say, as sufferers whose misfortune one must endeavor to alleviate. So there was nothing about Sir Jacob or his conversation to which Sydney felt she had any right to object. Many people besides the German-English were "little Englanders"—and it was not expected of the Fredericks family that they should feel any especial sympathy for France. She had heard that the man beside her had been most generous in his gifts to War Charities and she kept telling herself that she had no right to be so irritated. Yet she was irritated, and her replies grew so brief, that Sir Jacob

put her down as frightened by the company in which she found herself; and, so being very kind hearted and jolly, he took her himself to the cases of pheasants and the portrait of their slayer wearing a kilt, and side-whiskers, and beautiful, shining boots—and explained to her all the graciousness of that great and good potentate.

Lady Fredericks wore a stiff, high-necked frock and had evidently not been able to learn from her husband any of the *laisser-aller* of the '80s. Her daughter Hilda, who was handsome as well as intelligent, made a display of shoulders for both. Her son Hugo was not in khaki: Sir Jacob hinted vaguely that he had "a weakness" and he himself told Sydney that, while it was true the Board had deprived themselves of his services with the utmost reluctance, yet they had unanimously agreed that unless the crisis grew more acute—it would be suicidal to deprive the nation of his abilities in business.

"He works ever so late," said his mother gently, "and he has given up his golf already."

Hugo himself brushed aside these sacrifices as of no moment, but his eyes, behind the gold eye-glasses were full of weariness. The other person present—beside a silent little sister with a fair plait hanging over her shoulders, was a young man also not in uniform. His name was Gaultier Delaplaine—(not Walter, as he carefully explained to Sydney), and he also conveyed to her that the various fragments of verse which she might have noticed in the periodicals (but hadn't under the signature G. D.) were none other than his own. He had a round, flat, smooth face and a mild lisping voice; lived in Hampstead, and was "trying very hard," as he said, "not to allow himself to become unbalanced by the present crisis." She received the impression that his efforts had been crowned with complete success.

He talked a good deal, and very well, in a drawling monotone—gathering up into his conversation some of the literary and academic flotsam and jetsam which had been uprooted by the storm and lay tossing on these great tides, temporarily quite disregarded—and he had the effect of making Sir Thomas's secretary feel very uncultivated and provincial. If one mentioned Ypres he said only that he was disappointed in the French, the War had made them banale. If one spoke of Italy—he was glad to quote d'Annunzio's last gorgeous ode: but if one alluded to Belgium then he was either altogether silent in a superior manner—or joined with his host in deprecating the sentimentality of England which had led her into the quarrel. Once or twice he alluded to the United States of America as a country which lamentably failed to appreciate the vital importance of Chinese lacquer,—and in a manner so openly contemptuous that Sydney found it hard to bear. The novelty of her sensation caused her to realize that this was the very first time she had met with the arrogance, which she remembered having read and heard of as typically English; and she bore Mr. Gaultier Delaplaine no good-will for the introduction. Later in the evening, she learned to her stupefaction, that he had been born and brought up in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

The atmosphere of the talk and of the house was entirely different to that which she had become accustomed at the Easterly's or Miss Violand's and which regarded the War as the great *raison d'être* of existence. To tell just where this difference lay was not so easy, but chiefly in the fact that in this house the War was not the *raison d'être* of existence but rather a catastrophe which had broken an important friendship, interfered with vital plans, and might have been avoided for the quixotic ignorance of a few Englishmen, who had not had the superior advan-

tages of birth and education enjoyed by Sir Jacob himself. This appeared to be an intellectual conviction rather than anything more personal; but it was also true that in finding England to be an entirely separate and distinct country from that Germany from whom she had been content to take her rulers for several generations—had been a real shock to Sir Jacob, who had honestly regarded the two nations as practically one. If this were true, then to his mind the disloyalty was England's—or as he preferred to say, very handsomely, the Government's.

In all this there was not a word which could offend anyone—like Sydney—whose feelings were more ignorant and conventional—and there was certainly no hint of hoping for a German victory. Peace by arrangement—between two great nations who had nothing to gain and much to lose by stupidly continuing a fight which chiefly concerned their lesser and unimportant neighbors; peace by arrangement making for a durable future alliance—this was the Fredericks, ideal—and even this was very mildly advocated so that it had the effect of apparently turning anyone who opposed it into a bloodthirsty rattlepate. So at least, the young American felt.

After dinner they went into the Moorish drawing-room, opened the piano, and then Hilda with her sister, their brother with his violin, made the loveliest music together. It was played with such simplicity and skill, with such enthusiasm for the works of art they interpreted, and such an absence of self-consciousness as to be altogether delightful. The pleasure which this performance gave to the parents was no less agreeable to witness. Sydney Lea enjoyed it all intensely; and it was certainly odd that as she went homeward on top of a bus through the pale summer night, the Chopin phrases still sounded in her ears—she should have told herself that nothing would in-

duce her to visit the house again. She mentioned the occasion to Sir Thomas next morning and he looked at her, over his eye-glasses to ask "And what did you think of him?"

"I thought him perfectly detestable!" she replied with vigour, and her employer gasped and murmured "Oh did you, really?" in a tone suggestive of disapproval. Owing to this feeling, Sydney certainly received no impression that she had exercised any attraction for Mr. Gaultier Delaplaine, and she was distinctly surprised when he called on her one Sunday afternoon a week or two later. However, she presented him to Miss Violand who received him graciously and asked him to stay to tea. He talked in a lively anecdotal fashion about Bernard Shaw and George Moore and James Joyce, and the illness of Mr. Arthur Symons and the mistaken absorption in War work of many promising writers; and he pronounced the house and interior "most wonderful," congratulating her on her setting and atmosphere which "in London," he declared, "is more than half the battle." In fact, he made himself very agreeable and showed nothing at all of that disbelief in the War or in England, which had jarred on her at dinner and which would have infuriated Miss Violand. He was tactful and amusing: but at the same time, after he had departed, Sydney was conscious of a certainty that he had come with a purpose although that purpose had not been mentioned. She forgot him altogether without the slightest difficulty, until one hot afternoon a fortnight later as she took a turn in Kensington Gardens after her work was done, when he suddenly appeared out of nowhere and joined her. The round, flat face and lisping voice of this strange Pennsylvanian puzzled her not a little, but he talked to her gaily and pleasantly as they strolled along under the great trees.

"So you are the very remarkable young lady everybody is talking about," remarked Mr. Delaplaine after a pause. She was amused. "Am I really—and in what way?"

"Oh, secretary to an influential M. P. you know!"

"That isn't remarkable when one thinks of what women are doing."

"They say he never makes a move without your advice!"

"Who says so?"

But Mr. Delaplaine did not choose to answer that question. "It must be exciting to have any influence nowadays and I think you're awfully lucky," he continued half-enviously. "It is a job I should have been very glad to have myself, let me tell you, if only I had known how to set about it—but these English are so clannish!"

"No doubt you could, if—" her politeness failed her for the moment, but he never noticed her hesitation.

"Oh, of course there's no doubt of my fitness for it—I assure you" he hastened to tell her. "I'm a graduate of Lehigh—. But its meeting that sort of people—How in the world did you manage it? How did you first get hold of this old chap?"

She had delicate fibres, had Sydney, fastidious, invisible antennae which touched something in this speech and put her, inexperienced as she was, wholly on her guard. So her answer was rather vague—she didn't know—she had heard that Sir Thomas needed a typist and so on. Silence followed for a moment. They walked on in the level sun rays that pierced between the tree-trunks and Mr. Delaplaine appeared to consider the beauties of nature.

"I don't suppose he pays you very much," was his next observation.

"Not very much."

"Well, that's the custom, you know, in this country," explained he, waving his stick at a mild faced sheep standing contemplatively in their path; "they never pay high salaries for this kind of a job because there are so many perquisites attached to them."

"Perquisites?" she repeated, puzzled.

"Yes—perquisites, privileges, extras—fees arranged for by custom, you know!"

"It's hard to see what perquisites there could possibly be to a post like mine."

Mr. Delaplaine found her ignorance naive indeed. "My dear Miss Lea—you need instruction," said he lightly. "You don't know England yet—do you? Tradition has settled all this for generations. Else how could clever men—University men—afford to take such positions? Had you ever thought of that?"

"Not in that light, I confess."

"Well—now you understand. It is all quite above board and understood—quite expected. Indeed it's a part of the game."

"Still, I don't quite understand—"

"Ah but it's easily explained," he began to enlighten her—"You see—the secretary is there to come in contact first with everybody who sees the M. P. She hears what is wanted and all that. Well, of course, she makes up her mind whether it's a good thing or not; so then she can easily persuade the M. P.—Sir Thomas, for example, to see the thing as she does. Naturally, she should expect to be paid for her trouble."

"Oh I see! Yes, I know that's done in Russia." Her tone was enigmatical and some quality in it caused her companion to glance at her and to repeat that this custom was sanctioned by tradition.

"It isn't like Russia in the least—because the people are different," he proceeded. "A great deal of

the actual work falls on the secretary and this is simply a means of payment—like a commission in business. They make salaries low to allow for it. I've a friend named Belby, for instance—whose chief has a portfolio in the Cabinet. He gets a mere trifle but the perquisites make Belby's post worth while."

"Evidently," said Sydney with a smile, "I have wasted many opportunities out of ignorance, haven't I?"

Mr. Gaultier Delaplaine was a great amateur of irony, on paper, and had been known to declare that Gibbon and Swift were the passion of his life. But he had formed an opinion of this somewhat reserved, though charming young countrywoman, which did not admit of his recognizing it from her lips. Hilda Fredericks had told him that Sydney though clever was extremely American, with small knowledge of the great world. In Mr. Delaplaine's opinion, his own knowledge of that great world was immeasurable and complete. He walked on for a few paces and then changed the subject.

"Charming people, the Fredericks?"

She agreed.

"So musical—so up in everything! And rich!" he drew a breath of exhilaration at the very thought. "Awfully generous, too, Sir Jacob always is. There's a man I'd like to oblige, let me tell you. He never forgets a favor."

"I've heard," replied Sydney, "that he has given a deal to the Red Cross."

"And to everything else. Belby tells me that Rounceton's private secretary has been made for life by just helping Sir Jacob over a matter in the city. They say he has been set up for good and all—but here we are at the Dairy—is it too late for some tea?"

"I fear so," she looked at her watch and then at

her companion regretfully. "I must, unfortunately get a 'bus back—there are letters to go before the evening post. I'm so sorry!"

Those invisible guardians had warned her not to snub the man and she obeyed them, though it took self-control. She left him, standing with a smile on his flat face, and as she hurried down the path two spots of angry red burned in her cheeks. . . . Perhaps one should not exaggerate, however. . . . "I suppose," she thought, "he's just a common man who knows no better. I must try and forget his friend Belby and all the rest of it."

It was for a short time only, however, that she succeeded.

CHAPTER XV

FORTUNATELY for Sydney, this strange talk with Mr. Gaultier Delaplaine in Kensington Gardens was not the only reminder that the position of private secretary to a man in political life has its own dignities. Under peace conditions, Sir Thomas would unquestionably have selected for such a post, the son or the nephew of a friend or colleague—some charming boy, with a delightful profile and the cultivated drawl of his caste,—who would have regarded it as the starting-point of a political career, and whose leisure would have been much occupied with social engagements, among which dinners at his Chief's house would have been prominent.

Now, this side of life came late into Miss Lea's experience, partly because she in no way assumed or expected it and partly because, when he made the departure and engaged a woman, Sir Thomas had acted under pressure of the hardest bout of work he had yet known, and all subsidiary aspects had sunk out of sight for the time being. Sydney's predecessor, the well-connected Charles Bolder, had been a congenital incompetent, who, but for Sir Thomas's dislike of change, would long ago have been obliged to seek another employment. The reaction toward training and practical sense which had led Sir Thomas to choose Miss Lea for her present position, had been too strong to take anything else into consideration by comparison. In Sydney's American view, a secretary was no more than a sort of confidential upper clerk. The conversation in the last chapter had been a great surprise to her as well as a disagreeable shock; and it showed her the importance which many people at-

tached to her present work. The effect of it was to make her become rather more conscientious than before. Certainly she was the last person to feel that she should be included in any entertainment, although it was natural for her to enjoy such a chance, if it came.

By reason of her evident unconsciousness of such things—and no doubt because things were so different since the War and entertaining from the classic standpoint had all but ceased—the occasion was long in arriving. Lady Easterly held a reception to some visiting French Committee of Women War Workers, at which Sydney made herself exceedingly useful. A certain quality of fineness in her personality met with an instant response among the Latin guests, set them at ease, and lightened the hostess's burdens. With all the will in the world, Lady Easterly had never found it an easy or congenial task to entertain foreigners, who had such a perplexing way of looking baffled or discouraged just because one's expression of face did not change; and the more Lady Easterly felt this, the more wooden she became. Her graciousness and kindness, which were very real, seemed absolutely incapable of expression; and so she was very grateful to Miss Lea. She noted how Sydney flitted lightly hither and yon with a smile sparkling in dark eyes and lifting a delicate lip, never at a loss for some phrase of amateur French, for which the humour in her face more than atoned.

"She was of the greatest use to me, Thomas," Lady Easterly assured her husband. "Of course you know the Americans are much more like the French than we are and they get on with them somehow—" an opinion she continued to maintain against her husband's rather warm disagreement.

It was several months after this reception that Sydney received her first formal invitation to dine at

the Easterly's. She was interested in hearing from Janey that both Mr. and Mrs. Romeyne were coming —this being one of the few houses left in London which kept up the pretence that they lived together—"which Mother does" Janey added, "because she's fond of him and afraid of *her*."

Miss Lea had no preconception in the matter of English dinners and it will be recalled that so far her life had held few dinners of any description. Once she had made her slightly timid entry into the spacious and sacred drawing-room that stretched all across the second floor of the house, she was content to become a quiet observer of this new scene. The lack of any kind of introductions which so often outrages American feelings—particularly when they take this custom of the country for a personal slight—immensely surprised her, for she seemed to herself to have entered the wood in Alice where nothing has a name. Since perforce she held the naive view of the new world that such gatherings as these were primarily intended for pleasure and social intercourse, she was perplexed at the persistence of a custom which so interfered with this end. Later, she came to realize that they are nothing of the sort and no more designed with a view to mutual enjoyment than is a church service.

Such ritualistic assemblages as it was Sydney's fortune to witness were effectually brought to an end later on in the War, by the food situation, and came to be replaced by small gatherings of intimates. By this means the stiffness of centuries was done away with in six months or so, and the English nation became as simply and spontaneously gregarious as if it had never known the infliction of those solemn parties which even Thackerayan satire had failed to kill. As Miss Lea, then, was presented to nobody, save the man who sat on her left hand at the table, she had an uninterrupted chance to survey the room. She had heard a

good deal of lamentation about the necessity of simplifying both the food and the decorations, together with complaint that nothing could be done as it ought; but to her provincial view the standard remained that of the utmost opulence. Smith and the two assistant parlour-maids, the flowers sent down from Easterly Park, and—when she sat down to it—the wines and the dinner—scarcely needed apology, unless it were ironical. They all represented a scale of living which was hard to reconcile with what she knew to be the devoted patriotism and honest desire for self-sacrifice of Sir Thomas and his wife, whose minds simply were unable to adjust themselves other than very gradually, to the irresistible logic in the situation of a beleagured England. Parlour-maids instead of footmen, five or six courses instead of ten, four wines instead of a dozen were in their view a revolutionary programme—but one that bore small relation to what the secretary felt might have been done. Sydney meditated over all this, and came to the conclusion that whereas luxury was greater in her own country, yet it was not taken for granted, as in England, but remained always an extra. Won by somebody—presumably the master of the house, such opulence in the States may be more vulgar, more self conscious—yet always remains luxury and is not, as here, masked under the habitual guise of necessity.

With these thoughts in her mind, Miss Lea admired the fine proportions of the room and its air of dignity—the lights, set in tall vases of Chinese crackle; the furniture, which was of a type that only needs recovering once in a generation; the pictures of one or two by-gone Easterlys with ruddy 18th Century faces; and some rather painful watercolours by Janey, who had devoted herself to the art until laughed out of it by her brother Hugh. In this setting the guests tranquilly disposed themselves. She saw the

Romeynes, the wife dressed in vivid green, veiled with sequins and wearing a collar of opals set in rubies, her dark red hair swathed in a tight green bandage which threw into relief her heavy, unamiable features. The husband stood on the hearthrug beside his host, cool, aloof,—talking behind his moustache in a way he had which Sydney knew meant that he was not pleased.

In conversation with Lady Easterly were Mr. and Mrs. Pember Chyne. He was a tall man with an able face, melancholy eyes under heavy brows and a white beard trimmed to a point. His very low Oxford voice prevented most people from ever hearing the end of his sentences. An editor of one of the important Reviews, he had resigned at the beginning of 1915 to take a position under the Minister of Agriculture. His wife was a tiny woman, whose vivid, irregular face sparkled with animation, and whose soft, ejaculatory voice held notes like those of a bird. With her black frock she wore a set of delicate seed-pearl ornaments—long dangling ear-rings, a brooch, a necklace—intricate and subtle in their design to suit her personality. Her quick movements, the mobility of her fine face and expressive hands, gave Sydney a fascinated sense of watching some masterpiece of art; yet Rhoda Pember Chyne was the most unaffected of women and one who fulfilled herself to the delight of a large circle of friends. She bore so plainly the Celtic imprint that no one—save perhaps an American—but was aware that she was Irish. She turned from her hostess to greet a youngish man named James Spangler, who was a Labour Member, had large feet and hands, and spoke with the utmost deliberation in the broadest Yorkshire. Sydney had been present during a discussion concerning him which had preceded his invitation and which had much amused her. She felt she knew exactly why he was there.

It was with more interest that she beheld the arrival of Lord and Lady Welden, who were the next to appear—although she had no idea that it was to Lady Welden's word in season she owed her home with Miss Violand. Lady Welden was indeed an important person, than whom no one could be crisper over the telephone, more energetic in her own war-work or more peremptory in her demands on others. Of all the tribe of War-Working Peeresses, she was the most driving and the most efficient. No doubt in times of peace, the Countess may have been trying to the nerves of a good many leisurely people, who were glad to acknowledge now that she was probably the hardest-working woman in England. Her broad, crimson face and blunt manners were certainly far from attractive and the importance of her many tasks justified her—according to her own mind at least—in the habit of never listening to the end of what anybody said.

That she cast her Lord into the shade, he was at moments irritatedly conscious. Owing to his uncompromising past Toryism, Lord Welden had not been given any War post. It was reported of him that he had been more often turned down for a job than any member of the Peerage and the reason given by Romeyne was that he was an ass—"not a *silly* ass, but a clever ass!" His appearance was striking—a huge, bulky man, whose flaming, twyform beard lent him a semi-heroic aspect, increased by his long, wine-coloured curls, giving him a hirsute look among that pallid clean-shaven generation. The theatricality of Lord Welden's personality was hardly lessened by his clever, half-shut narrow eyes and his long waving hands, nor by the fact that he wore a black satin stock instead of the conventional tie. He was one of the few people in the room to drop his *gs* in the Victorian manner; and, during the pauses in the conversation,

Sydney could hear his voice telling Mrs Romeyne what he was doin' and where he was goin' and how he was feelin' about the Western Front. The lady's flattered and fawning laughter was immediately responsive.

The remaining couple were the Hon. Folliot Caird and his wife—he, a rising barrister, legal adviser to the Foreign Office, had recently spent some months in Washington. Sydney had met them both before, at a War Fête, where Caird had talked to her with a good deal of interest. She was very ready, therefore, when he appeared to take her out to dinner, to continue their talk, even though it took the form of a catechism on his part concerning things American.

"How many men do you think the Germans can get together against you at home in case you decide to come in?" was one question, and this was easier to answer with a vague guess, than the next; "I imagine that it would take the States at least three or four years to form an Army, anyhow?" which she rather indignantly refuted by a reference to the Civil War.

Mr. Caird had heard of the Civil War, although it remained hazy in his mind as an inconsiderable sort of row, not to be compared with such an example of the real thing as, let us say, the Indian Mutiny. He confessed to have been a little surprised when in America to find that it had left still perceptible traces. He remembered that the cotton-spinning industry had been affected by it; but certainly, he had not expected to find that there were more monuments to its soldiers in the States, than exist, in his own land, to those soldiers who died in South Africa. What had most impressed him about Sydney's country was first, its wealth, and second, the fact that this wealth was so frequently expressed in terms of ready money. He had met lots of men there, "successful men, splendid fel-

las"—who seemed content to have their one home in a town house, or even a flat, who had no desire whatever for what he would have called "an establishment"; and who never seemed to feel that their wealth required anything of that type from them. They lived as it pleased them to live, they didn't bother; and nobody thought them eccentric.

This flexibility of the family budget and of life generally, had enormously appealed to him,—who was still in the stage of forming a fortune—and yet who was always finding his expenditure determined by position rather than by income. The scale of living in England, he explained, was set for one, by a sort of unescapable tradition, making one the slave of public opinion. These facts made him envious of the superior opportunities, the freedom of American life.

"And then," he added, "we're not adaptable the way you are,—I'd like to see my wife get along, as your women do when their husbands chance to have a bad year—two or three servants,—look after the children yourself, and all that, y'know!"

"I am looking at her across the table," said Sydney, "and I feel quite sure she could."

Mr. Caird shook his head, and then, harking back once more to the subject which had the real interest for him, asked, "Do you think that by any fluke the Kaiser could buy up some of your prominent men, and so keep you out of it?"

Her sense of intense anger and insult lasted by a flash, when she noted the unconsciousness and absorption of his face. After all, how could he know? Moreover, such questions, when they came from intelligent people, or those predisposed to like and admire the States, were of value in educating her to the condition of mind which existed, she felt, among the large class entirely lacking such sympathy.

Mr. Spangler, the Labour member, sat on her other

hand. Not only did she find his Yorkshire accent difficult to follow, but she soon began to feel as though the act of conversation with him resembled that of tending a machine. She fed into this machinery a remark or a question, which disappeared into its recesses; then she found she must wait a perceptible interval before an answer was produced in a slow, reflective grumble. These responses took so long to evolve that any note of playfulness—always natural to one of her nationality—became grotesque. The light touch was evidently unknown to Mr. Spangler. Rather desperately, Sydney asked him about the food situation, which was then beginning to be discussed. Her observation was received in silence, and, some minutes after she had begun to wonder whether the man was deaf, he suddenly began to deliver a well-considered review of the subject, with statistics as to crops, reserve stores, available tonnage for transportation and estimated loss by submarines—a lecture occupying him for ten minutes or so. At its conclusion she thanked him warmly and felt free to turn her attention back again to Mr. Folliot Caird.

The barrister was the type which one knows to be that of a Londoner, as distinguished from the country bred and ruddy land owner, like Easterly or Welden. Pale and professional-looking, with a thin face and eye-glasses—his countenance seemed well fitted for the framework of a wig. His wife was a pretty young woman, whose violet eyes and smart French clothes belonged to the modern generation and set her apart from Lady Easterly or Mrs. Chyne as completely as though she were of another nationality. The exotic quality in Sydney Lea's dress and appearance interested Mrs. Caird, to whom the other people present—far more picturesque and individual though they were—had become an old story. To her mind an American woman stood, if not in this particular case for

money, yet always for liveliness, novelty and chic. After the women had ascended to the drawing-room, she seated herself by the secretary to ask her all about New York and its wonderful theatres, cabarets and dance-places, which she longed to see.

"But I've only been there once in my life!" cried Sydney laughing, "and that was when I sailed for Europe." Mrs. Caird sympathized.

"It's beastly to be poked off into the provinces," she remarked. "I had to stay in Worcestershire until I married, with only a fortnight every spring in town. Fancy! And I was jolly well sick of it, I can tell you. Did you live on a ranch?"

That misconception by which the Londoner regards every American as hailing from New York, while retiring at intervals to an orange-plantation in southern California or a ranch in Wyoming, had become so familiar to Sydney Lea by this time that she had ceased making any effort to correct it. She answered only, therefore, that her home was in Massachusetts, but that she had expected to be at work in New York, had she not decided to stay on in England. Mrs. Caird thought it was "awfully sporting" of Sydney to relinquish her New York position and her tone held both sincerity and heartiness. She told about her children—a boy at school and two little girls named, quite inevitably, Moira and Eileen. Meanwhile, on the sofa before the fire, Lady Welden was giving Mrs. Pember Chyne a frank account of her difficulties with the Government, in her organization of the Woman's Food and Fuel Defence League, —to which the other listened with vivid sympathy depicted on her mobile face. Mrs Romeyne was talking to her hostess.

"Very darin', I call it—to have that American girl in the house," she was observing. "First thing you know, she'll be goin' off with one of your boys."

"Not at all! Not at all!" said Lady Easterly hastily. "She isn't that sort in any way."

"Those people make one think what they wish," the other drawled. "She's much too good-lookin' in my opinion." Here Mrs. Romeyne lifted her ruby-studded eye-glass and surveyed Sydney Lea with disapproval. "Not that she's really handsome y'know: too washed-out. But men like them. I'd never let her be my husband's secretary—although he never notices 'em. He's really not a man at all—it's like bein' married to a stick of wood."

Mrs. Romeyne's habit of assuming that because her husband was indifferent to her, he was therefore insensible to the charms of all women, had become well known to her large circle of female enemies, and Lady Easterly had no desire to make trouble for Adrian by combating it on this occasion. She turned the subject—not very adroitly but she did it; and soothed herself by the reflection that she need not ask Mrs. Romeyne to her house for another year at least.

"Really, the woman's too dreadful," was her inward comment. "How can Adrian bear it?"

At that moment Romeyne entered the room, his clear, carrying voice just finishing an observation concerning a Cabinet Minister:

"The man's mind," Sydney heard him say as he passed her chair, "the man's mind is so full of his own importance that it hasn't room for an idea!"

Both Caird and Pember Chyne followed him eagerly to the hearthrug to continue their discussion, which lasted until Lady Welden rolled up her knitting, arose and shouted out in her resonant voice that, as she had to be up at seven next morning, washin' dishes in her canteen—she must be gettin' to bed. She bore off her flamboyant Earl—looking like a Beowulf who had somehow strayed into modern life: and

shortly afterwards the Romeynes also took their departure and the party broke up.

Mrs. Caird, as she rose, gave Sydney a smiling invitation to come in to tea on Sunday and see the babies; and the secretary saw her leave with the pleasant sense of future possibilities in the way of friends. She was more surprised, though none the less delighted, when a low voice called her by name, and, turning, she looked down upon Mrs. Pember Chyne, who was in the act of asking her to call. The little lady's delicate face and ruffled grey hair gave the girl a keen stab of artistic pleasure, in contemplating anything so picturesque and charming.

"You will come to see us, won't you? Lady Easterly has been telling me all about you and I'm always at home on Thursdays for tea—even nowadays, because my husband likes it."

"I should love it!" Sydney cried "although my time, you know, is not my own."

"I know. We will ask Sir Thomas. I want to hear all about your wonderful country. And you are fond of books, too, are you not? I feel sure of it. We will have a good talk," nodded Mrs Chyne and moved away.

Sydney betook herself homeward through the ominously empty streets, bearing with her the recollection of a kindly glance and a word—"And how are you, Miss Lea?" from Romeyne, as he passed out.

The Folliot Cairds was the first young household that Sydney saw in England; and it gained much in her eyes from that fact. Edith Caird was many years younger than her husband and was a good deal absorbed in her nursery and in her girl-friends—so the War shadow did not brood over her home as over so many others that Sydney had seen. It was, indeed, a ménage in the full sunshine of youth, health and success, very pleasant to behold. They lived in Hans

Place—gayest and most smartly modern of squares, in a house that was quasi-American both in size and appearance and that within doors held a piquant vivacity of colour and decoration. The pretty parlour-maid, who admitted Miss Lea, wore a crimson frock, with an apron and Alsatian cap of pleated black net; and the room into which she ushered the guest was all done in black and white stripes against which cushions and draperies of strong orange, blue and scarlet, made a vivid effect. It was very gay and striking, and Sydney complimented her hostess, who made a deprecating gesture.

"I'm glad you like it, Roger doesn't;" she candidly admitted, "he says it's like living on the stage in a *décor du théâtre Antoine*. So he won't sit in it, and after dinner I always have to have my cigarette with him in his dreadful, messy little den. "Ah! here come the children."

The door had opened to admit two little girls of five and three under the guidance of a severe personage, who left them to their mother with the manner of one making a great concession. Pretty creatures both, with thick mops of hair, large starry eyes and bare legs, the children conducted themselves with that air of fulfilling an expected routine, which is so amazing to the stranger in English nurseries. They curtsied to the visitor; they each received a cake, which they sat on two chairs to nibble, and occasionally replied in monosyllables to her friendly attempts at conversation. In her heart, Sydney thought, that handsome as they were, they had rather an air of well trained animals than of human beings. But their brother surprised her even more. The girls had a look of stolidity and physical perfection, in singular contrast to the boy, who was as thin and pale as if he had been born across the Atlantic. Mrs. Caird observed that he was home from his preparatory school

on account of not being quite well—and he struck the visitor as being physically both ill-nourished and over-repressed. At nine, Jack Caird had all the poise and subdued effect of a blasé little man of the world, and caused Sydney to reflect that in this country, childhood ended early for the male. He gave evidences of careful training as to manners and personal appearance; while at the same time, the latter bore witness to an unheard-of neglect. His teeth needed cleaning and straightening, and he had a slight, but perceptible defect of vision; while his repression and reticence went beyond mere shyness and seemed to hint at sinister influence. Sydney, with memories of a boy-cousin of the same age, with his radiant friendliness, bubbling spirits and restless vitality—felt at a loss how to deal with this critical and tranquil little gentleman. She thought to herself that she had never seen a young creature so lacking in joyousness and so afraid to express either interest or pleasure.

By this time two or three young women in uniform had gathered about the tea-table and talk grew animated. But Sydney did not give up her efforts to draw the boy out, so long as she thought there was any hope. If he had the usual childish liking of novelty, he had long been schooled not to show it, so she found herself groping through an empty little mind, in which every idea had long since been stereotyped. It was a strange experience to find an English boy reproducing in his person some of the worst faults to be found in American education fifty years ago, by English critics—namely the loss of childhood—but it was one often to be repeated. Her reflection—as the door shut on the three children was, that if the new generation of Englishmen was to exhibit the strongly-marked individuality of the past, it must develop late, and this was followed by another to the effect that the system of forbidding any expression of feelings,

soon resulted in the child's having no feelings to express.

"Now, Miss Lea!" her hostess cried gaily, "you can pay some attention to *us*."

The gaitered young Rosalinds around the tea-table ate with frank appetite, smoked with gusto and talked with candour. They had broad faces and long legs, large eyes and splendidly abundant hair. They bore to Sydney a breath of high courage and young achievement; and she was soon chatting and laughing—telling, perhaps, an American story or two—with an exhilaration that she had lost during War-time but which brought vividly back to her, the green of her college campus, and its overhanging elms, her long talks with Elizabeth—in the days when life was an individual matter and one's ears were not filled day and night with the cry of a world in pain.

In none of these young girls did she find the mental alertness to which she was accustomed. One and all of them seemed to have been imperfectly educated, to be both impervious and indifferent to ideas. Their vocabularies were astonishingly narrow; their views of life were, (apart from their work) quite frankly greedy and even sensual; in their attitude toward men coquetry and sexual appeal had ceased to be unconscious or spontaneous, and had become quite direct, studied even, candid to a point which took the American's breath away. Man was still, in the England of 1915, the only possible purveyor to woman of all that made life worth living; the great prize; the giver of that physical passion which was the underlying pre-occupation of her existence and of the luxury by which it was expressed and crowned. Woman was here the hunter, who must match her cunning against the superior strength and position of her prey. This, at least was the assumption. Sydney Lea, fresh from a world less coarse and sensual, although perchance,

more hypocritical and anemic, had never before come into contact with this War between the Sexes; in her dim, young imagination marriage had been expressed in terms of a sublimated comradeship; it was a species of emotional co-operation. The Woman Question had never interested her in the least, but she began to realize that the claims of the English feminists were based on reality. War had made a sudden demand upon the powers of these vigorous female creatures, which was changing, though it had not yet wholly changed, their attitude toward these things. If not they, at least their daughters, would have opened to them in future so many doors into the wide world, that man would cease to be the only possible purveyor of all that made life worth while, and woman might once again resume her ancient place of hunted rather than of huntress.

Surely, Sydney thought, she deserved it after such self-devotion; and she glanced across the room at one rosy and long-limbed Amazon, whose eight hours of truck driving per day, were taken for granted as gayly and simply as was her candidly-expressed determination to get a husband out of it, somewhere en route, "Because, y'see, in a year or two there won't be enough men to go 'round, and then, not havin' a bob, I shall never have an earthly!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE variety in London houses was a delight to Sydney Lea, who found nothing so picturesque as the contrast between the lively modernity of the Caird's and the vague, dingly-impressive spaces of the region around Russell Square. Moreover, the moment she entered the Pember Chyne's, her heart leaped with joyful recognition of an interior already loved. A house lined and walled with books, exhaling the richest sense of the life of and for books, was something she too, remembered.

Her hostess, bending over the fire, looked like a brownie or a fairy godmother. She wore her grey hair puffed and tied with ribbon like an eighteenth century portrait, while her slight shoulders were enveloped in a wrap lined with fur. Sydney's pleasure in their meeting was so visible that it was an inspiration to Rhoda Pember Chyne, who had found such sensitive response rare among the youth of her day. She had often commented that Americans tended to be old-fashioned in regard to their love of the literary background, and this girl's enjoyment of it, caused the elder woman to sparkle with anecdote; to pour the rich wine of her experience—"with beaded bubbles winking at the brim"—more gaily and freely as she afterwards declared, than she had done for months.

She told Sydney war-stories, political stories; she repeated *bons mots* of the past. It gave her particular joy to recall that when in the first months of the War, the Admiralty spread oil upon the waters of Margate Bay, in order to trouble enemy submarines, the town

of Margate put in a claim against the Admiralty for spoiling the sea-bathing! She chuckled at the reply made to a Royal host, who was assuring his guests that in event of an air-raid, the cellars had been made ready, by a *bon vivant* Minister, who did not like the new régime of barley-water; why not go there now, Sir?" Had Sydney ever heard what Jowett said, when someone, forgetting he had been recently made a widower, met him on Piccadilly and asked "When's your wife coming up?" "She comes up at Easter!" was the immortal answer.

Then she talked about a walk with Tennyson under the great oaks; of an evening, when, curled up on the sofa, she heard Swinburne recite *Laus Veneris*, his hair flaming in the firelight; of an amusing encounter between Huxley and Renan, where the humourous and impatient energy of the one was contrasted with the suave and pontifical gravity of the other; and of her own battle royal with Oscar Wilde—when Irish wit met Irish wit and the woman came out the victor.

It was to Sydney like the unrolling of a tapestry, on which were woven many shining figures, although, now and again, Mrs Chyne would repeat, with a sigh, in her soft voice: "Oh how long ago that seems—how quite done with—how ended!"

Then some memory would bring back her bubbling laughter and she was off once more with description of the view of the river from the windows of the Pennell's flat in Buckingham Street, or of Whistler and Henry James, both of whom she had disliked; or of Walter Pater, whom she dearly loved and went to visit every year; or of walking home under an umbrella, with a serious, blue-eyed army officer, who talked about the Bible and whose name was Gordon. All these vignettes—which might otherwise have been mere futile reminiscence were backed solidly by a mind holding well-considered impressions and critical

values, which it had registered concerning these interesting figures. Nor were these all necessarily flattering. Mrs. Chyne would not have been herself without a caustic candour which pierced many illusions and set many a hero tottering on his pedestal. This was particularly true of War celebrities, whose evanescent glory gave one of her type only a sense of pain, by contrast with the weightier minds of the past.

"Although, I do believe—" she nodded her small head, "that we may expect a great deal from Mr. Romeyne—who was dining at the Easterly's that night—you remember? I am usually dreadfully disappointed in these new men—especially Liberal politicians—but I am agreeably surprised in him and so I told Walter. He is distinctly in the grand style—his mind has the quickness and the serenity. We may look to him, I feel sure."

Sydney was very much interested and inclined to agree; but just then the master of the house came in for a cup of tea and the subject was dropped. Mr. Chyne appeared war-worn and weary—more so, to the secretary's eye, than were those professional politicians whom she saw continually and who carried their cares more lightly. His wife's gaze rested on him with a shade of anxiety and she seemed to read between the lines of his low-toned observations—most of which the visitor's ear could not even catch. She did gather that he looked forward to the approaching winter with little confidence.

His arrival was followed by that of two or three others: a young Japanese attaché, whose politeness was as exquisite as his mental dexterity—both of them seeming equally exotic: a Serbian priest, with bare feet and high fur cap, whose curled black beard gave him the look of a sculptured Babylonian monarch come to life;—and shortly after, Sydney took her leave. It was not however these exotic personal-

ties that peopled the smoky streets for her on her homeward way, but the talk with her hostess, and this she resolved should be often repeated.

Thus Thursday afternoon came to have for her a new and pleasurable significance. Very seldom did she encounter at Rhoda's hearth anyone of her own age, but England had taught Sydney a new interest in the intercourse with her elders—a joy far too little understood in her own country, where the ages are kept rigidly separated into different social strata. Women she met at the Chyne's were apt to be plainly dressed; their low-voiced chat was full of spice and flavored with an exotic Victorianism. The men were always men of parts. Journalists or politicians or diplomats or scholars came most often, even those who went nowhere else. Once Sydney was asked to luncheon and found herself the only woman beside her hostess, and her place on the right hand of her host. That day, Walter Pember Chyne was inclined to be more cheerful and talkative than usual. Upon this subdued temperament the War had laid an absolutely crushing hand; widening the sphere of his anxieties from the personal to the general; disrupting his whole existence and shattering the quiet of his study. His wife had felt able to continue her literary work, but not he. However, today he shook off his depression; he revealed to his young guest his store of learning, topped with a delicate superstructure of fine and discriminating taste, and expressed with a flavor which Sydney did not know enough to recognize as savoring of the donnish.

Of the two other men present, one, named Percival Burghley, a member of a great family, was working with quiet self-devotion in a branch of the Intelligence Department. He was an ascetic-looking person, with a scared eye so diffident as to make it hard for a chance acquaintance to profit by his real talent and

cultivated sensitiveness. He talked little; but he listened with palpable delight to his hostess's stories.

The name of the other man, who chanced to sit beside her, Sydney did not at first catch. Even in this land of marked individualities he was probably, she decided, an oddity. He looked like a gypsy, short, dark and quick with pointed, obstinate features and the softest, mildest, gentlest little voice that ever was heard to issue from a by-no-means gentle mouth. Over his fatigued, lack-lustre eyes he wore powerful lenses, his back was bent; his hands stained with chemicals. In strange contrast, he had the muscles, the reach, the torso of an athlete or a wrestler, and his round head was covered with thick, black hair standing upright, like the fur on a creature of the wild. Indeed, his whole personality had about it something inhuman, like a wild thing that might reveal itself perhaps charmingly enough and then be startled back into cover. She soon gathered that his work was that of an investigator among high explosives; that he lived daily, hourly even, in danger of swift and terrible death—death more sure, more terrible than that which stalked the trenches; death which would crush him out of life as he might put his foot on an ant in the path.

The talk fell—as it was so apt to do during these autumn months,—on the jealousies and incompetencies of men in high places and it was evident from the host's manner that this particular guest had been a victim. Pember Chyne directed the comments to him as to one who had had a significant experience.

"It's a bit hard on a chap, isn't it?" he answered Sydney's glance of enquiry. "Especially, when he knows ways and means. Yes: I did have a row with the W. O.—; but I was only twenty-five—its nearly ten years ago now. They kicked me out of my post at Woolwich, because I had my own opinions and

stuck to 'em. Well—and you see—now! After all, I *have* worked in the great German chemical laboratories and I know some of their little ways."

"Yes: I want you to tell Burghley about that," Pemberton Chyne observed; but the other blinked, smiled and went on addressing his remarks, in a very low voice, to the American lady, rather than to Mr. Burghley.

"One would like to use their own science against them. But those duffers won't hear me—they hate me."

"But why should they hate you?"

He raised his eye-brows and shook his head.

"Because a bureaucracy always hates you if you show it up. There is only one thing they value—their own importance. They want to think I'm done with."

"Evidently, you're not, however."

"No: but one loses time—valuable time. My invention—this new flashless powder, is needed now—this very day." He gave a shrug. "You see, I showed them too plain that I thought them a set of inefficient fly-blown, pride-begotten formalists. They'll never forgive me."

"Not when they need your ability?"

"Oh no. Mustn't be clever in this country, you know."

"Must never show it, you mean," Sydney rejoined, interested, and thinking of Romeyne.

"Exactly! But its odd you should know it. . . . Do the red tape artists worry you in your job, now?"

She confessed to a feeling of irritation at the self-importance of authority generally, but supposed it was due to her American training. The somewhat naive way in which Sydney made this acknowledgement caused a smile to go around the table.

"And yet from all I hear," Percival Burghley ob-

served, "I should say that we are much greater sticklers for our individual liberties here than in Miss Lea's country, where co-operation is the order of the day. Authority doesn't seem to worry them in the States!"

"They are lots of reasons for that. . . . You see," Sydney answered eagerly, "it is more temporary and it's the result of the effort of a special person or a special group. We feel it to be due to the expert. . . . Here it's vested in certain classes and certain families, whether the individual representing them at the moment be worthy to handle it or not."

Percival Burghley nodded. He knew this to be true of his own experience as well as that of the great and influential family of which he was a member. Still, it was interesting to have it so aptly analysed.

"And you mean to say that after all these *years* you can't get a hearing before the War Department?" he asked the inventor, with a shade of incredulity in his well-bred voice.

"Apparently not."

"Surely," Sydney cried, "they're not all like that! Why, I have many times heard Sir Thomas talk about these different men—officials on the staff. He gave me the impression of very brilliant, broad-minded men!"

The little inventor laughed. "I should not like to destroy that impression. . . . A professional soldier is a routine-bred creature who is almost never broadminded. . . . And our Staff is provincial, narrow-minded, jealous of the French—who really know what they are doing. I could give you instances, plenty of them; but what's the use? We prefer muddlers—in this country."

"But not all of them!" Sydney persisted.

"All but one or two. There is one man I should

like to talk to and I must try. They say he's intelligent and that he will really listen to one."

"Which man is that?" she asked.

He smiled at her insistence.

"Sir Hector Menzies."

"Oh but I know him very well!" Sydney remarked serenely. "I was thinking of him as you spoke. He is an intimate friend of my Chief and comes to the house very often."

The inventor's eye lost that politely perfunctory interest and studied her face more seriously.

"I've forgotten your Chief's name—if I ever knew it?"

"He's Sir Thomas Easterly."

"The M. P.? Oh, of course—I've met him. A charming man—very sound. And you say General Menzies is a friend of his?"

"They have been friends all their lives. . ."

"Ah, indeed . . .!"

"If you cared—if you thought it worth while," Sydney said with friendly frankness, "I could speak to either one of them . . .?"

"You are too good." His manner was hesitant and stiff. Quite evidently he was at a loss just how to take her suggestion. Mrs. Chyne at that instant rose from the table and Sydney followed. As the door closed after them, it cut short her host's voice saying: "Listen, old chap, I want you to tell Burghley just what . . ."

The two women went into the study. "Who is Mr. Liston?" Sydney asked, when they were settled on either side of the fire and Rhoda was opening her knitting bag.

"The most wonderful little man, my dear! Walter thinks everything of his talent. He's a chemist . . . one of the few we have who know the Germans and their ways. . . . Unfortunately, as you heard him

tell, he got into trouble with the Ordnance people, years ago when he was quite a lad. And it seems he can't get anyone to listen to him now."

"So he said. It seems to have gone very deep."

"It did. In fact, I think his career was all but ruined. He wasn't respectful nor in the least disciplined. . . . Oh, I know he probably was very unwise . . . but still! Walter thinks that now their differences should be forgotten, in view of his new discoveries. He has several inventions apparently and one in particular, which they ought to try."

"He wants to meet Sir Hector Menzies. Perhaps I might be able to manage it."

"It would be splendid if you would!" Mrs. Pember Chyne relinquished her knitting for a moment in her earnestness. "All the men whose opinion is worth anything believe in Ernest Liston. Even the Germans seemed to give hearing always to their men of genius. Only we refuse—with us jealousies and rivalries seem to prevail. . . . I wish you could manage it, my dear!"

"Then I shall try at least," said the secretary, "but what a queer fellow he is!"

"Just like a little fury, wild animal," Rhoda agreed. "I always feel that he would turn and bite if he were vexed. . . . Still he has ideas—and just now when we are all so discouraged, that means a great deal."

But the situation puzzled her friend. "It ought to mean everything. What earthly difference does it make after all if he quarrelled with somebody or other ten years ago? The personnel of the Department must have changed?"

"Completely, of course. All that was in Lord Haldane's day—And as a matter of fact, I believe he stood by poor Ernest and did all he could for him.

Because you see, my dear, the point is that Ernest was right."

"That is just what I can't understand. . . . Then how can it affect him now?"

Rhoda looked at her. "But the Department is . . . well, the Department! The man may change . . . but the policy must be supported."

"You mean the Department has got to go on standing for its own mistakes? I suppose so. . . ."

"Well, then," cried Sydney, vigorously, "I must say I do sympathize with Florence Nightingale!"

Her friend laughed merrily. "You'd have hated her . . . I did . . . To meet, I mean. She was an odious woman. . . . But there, I understand you. . . . And you will not forget, poor Ernest, will you?"

"You may be sure I shall not, if I ever have a chance"

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Thomas Easterly was a clever young undergraduate at Cambridge, Hector Menzies was a clever and younger cadet at Sandhurst. Separated though they were in years, the two became close friends, and maintained that friendship when they went their several ways in the service of the Empire. Age and experience brought a difference of outlook as it had developed a difference in temperament, but the congeniality and affection remained, and whenever the soldier was in England, he saw much of the Easterly household. The boys were devoted to him and owed it to his aid that they so rapidly reached that active service which had ended the life of one of them and the career of another.

Hector Menzies had always been a lucky man. Promotion had come to him rapidly; some people said more rapidly than he deserved. In the beginning he had been strapped for money, but a prudent marriage had settled all that on the right side, and done him the further benefit in the eyes of society by providing him with a wife whom nobody ever saw, and whom no one ever thought it necessary to invite along with her husband. Just before 1914 he had become, in due course, Sir Hector, and was beginning to think about the retired list and a life of rather more domesticity than heretofore; sweetened, no doubt, by occasional visits to town, where he could make his headquarters at the United Service Club and lighten the burden of formal, "great" parties by an elderly, not too assiduous devotion to the prominent *hetairai* of

the moment. But 1914 postponed these visions and substituted a more active rôle in the greatest drama on any stage, than Menzies had ever anticipated. He was a man of exceptional abilities, erratic and uneven at times in the execution of his ideas, but always mentally quick and dominating. 1915 found him on the General Staff, and in that position regarded by a large number of people as representing the British Army at its highest pitch of perfection.

Nothing could be more natural than that such a personality, attached to such a personage, should be of interest to Sir Thomas's secretary. Sir Hector was a superbly handsome man, a high type of physical beauty even in middle-age; astonishingly fit still, though a trifle empurpled after dinner; always keen; mentally, and corporeally energetic, full of ideas and of affability. His knowledge of the other sex, formed after a somewhat wide experience, lent his manner toward any subordinate females he might encounter in the course of his day, a sort of caressing condescension which was never undignified, but very glorious. He set much store by the accessories of his high place, which his private means enabled him to heighten in a befitting manner. His car was the powerfulest, the shiniest, the raciest in London; his chauffeur-or derlies were the most erect and wooden-faced in the Army; and his own tall figure carried its gold and scarlet trimmings more impressively than any other on the Staff.

A social system of unknown complexity being, bit by bit, revealed to Sydney Lea, her whole attitude toward life was altered and colored. Not only had she come better to understand her own place therein and that of her work for Sir Thomas, as she came better to understand this world which made its background, but the people moving around her gained in picturesqueness. Sir Thomas's friends became the

dramatis personae for whose entrances and exits she looked, as she sat in the theatre of her office, and whose parts were played out in a vast daily drama. General Menzies was inevitably an important member of the cast, more important, Sydney sometimes reflected, than his past achievements would seem to warrant. She had often heard him talk about his views and plans to his friend—he talked a great deal. He had a resonant high-pitched, jolly voice and never hesitated. He was one of those naturally indiscreet men that women love; and he managed to convey the impression that his talk was an overflow from a limitless reservoir of vigorous and active intellection, and from a store, deep and full, of vital ideas. There were times when the quiet observer wondered if the reservoir was really there, or if the stream was not perhaps, shallower than was supposed. However, Sir Hector was on the Staff: that was the main point, the one which recurred to her mind the day after her luncheon at the Pember Chyne's, and her talk with that odd creature, the inventor, Ernest Liston.

Somehow or other his estimate of Menzies, as a man broadminded, neither petty nor fearful of new ideas, had been a surprise to Sydney. From such a source, from a man who had come into contest with officialdom and had been broken by it, that attitude seemed to her decidedly unexpected. She kept wondering if his estimate was right.

When she returned to Charles Street from Whitehall that afternoon, whither she had carried some document for Sir Thomas, it was to find, as often before, the General's large and shining car standing at the front door. Voices, intermingled with laughter, sounded first from the dining-room and then from the study. Presently the three men came into the outer room—the third being Adrian Romeyne, who was

looking as nearly bored as he ever permitted himself to look. Sir Hector topped his two tall companions by a half-a-head. He seemed actually a radiant blaze of scarlet and gold braid, of decorations and good-nature. His breathing was a trifle perceptible; but then Sir Thomas's brandy was famous. Sydney thought his uniform was beginning to look a little stretched at the seams. Before her inner visions, arose a clear picture of the man with the strange, determined face and mild, little voice, who had expressed such hope and faith in this dazzling being.

Sir Hector did not forget, in his meteoric passage through the room, to throw the young lady a breezy, kindly greeting. She smiled back, in honest pleasure at the fine head, the regular, strong features, the man's very real beauty. But for the others, Sir Hector, seeing her smile, might have lingered. But he knew Easterly—"Dear old Tom!" as his thoughts indulgently termed his conventionally-minded friend, and so he passed on to the street—the other accompanying him affectionately to the very door of his car, to finish their chat. Sir Hector took his seat, very beautifully—as if Royalty were watching. Sydney marked the wooden-faced stiffness of the orderly at the wheel. When she returned her glance into the room, it was to encounter that of Mr. Romeyne who was seated on the fender as his way often was when finishing his cigar. Something in his eye encouraged her to venture a question: "Is the General really a very brilliant mind?"

"Who, Red Tabs? Red Tabs? What makes you ask that? Why the invidious doubt? He's very splendid this afternoon at all events."

"I was meaning his work on the Staff. I had heard—"

"Yes: you had heard . . .?"

". . . That he was the only one of them who was

open-minded and free from petty personal jealousies . . . who was capable of new ideas, who had not let officialdom cramp his energies. . . . ”

Romeyne smoked on contemplatively.

“Did you really? All that? How very interesting to find such an opinion! I think it is probably quite just. Yes: I feel sure it is right. Menzies has never been a narrow man, nor unduly arrogant, nor jealous of his authority.” She wanted to ask: “Then why do you so dislike and distrust him?” but knew she must not. Instead, she uttered a gently-interrogative. “Ah!” and waited till he continued:

“He is certainly supposed to do good work on the Staff and that takes brains. Many people will tell you that he would do even better in France. I do not deny it: I do not know. Only there are moments when one feels—”

He broke off his sentence to watch the subject of it straighten in his corner of the motor and become, apparently, at once absorbed in great plans. The car slid off and Sir Thomas turned back to his house. Then Adrian finished: “When one feels that somehow Red Tabs is too good to be true.”

With Easterly’s return, the two men went back into the library and closed the door. Miss Lea was left in silent possession of the darkling office and her own reflections. These were to the effect, first, that Romeyne had expressed her own impressions to a fine shade; and second, that in all probability Fate would before long furnish her with a means of putting these impressions to the proof, and of testing whether Red Tabs was really too good to be true, or not. It would be no difficult matter to introduce the subject of Ernest Liston and perhaps to arrange later on, a carefully casual meeting.

The opportunity did not fail to present itself before many days, although in an unexpected form. A

question was to be asked in the House and Sir Thomas turned to his friend for certain of the requisite information. The reply, forwarded promptly, and containing data full, succinct and satisfactory in its arrangement, unquestionably roused the secretary's professional admiration and shook her doubts. Here was no muddler. The postscript contained a paragraph as follows:

"It is perfectly true—and disgraceful in my opinion—that there has been no attempt at all to go on with the experiments on a flashless powder, which everyone was so keen about. The young fellow at work on it ten or twelve years ago got into a row with the chap at the top, who seems to have been a peculiarly vicious example of mutton-headed autocrat. The investigator showed up his incompetency but got kicked out in doing it; and the matter has stood still ever since. So far as I can find out it was a serious loss, since this chap had been educated in Germany and should have been employed by us. They say he's kept on privately working at it and by now has the stuff perfected. I want to get hold of that chap, unofficially, if I can. His name is Liston."

"How very odd, Sir Thomas," ventured the secretary, as she entered the library, looking very trig in her blue serge, to lay these letters before her chief; "how really odd that I should have talked with this very Liston, of whom Sir Hector writes!"

Sir Thomas, who was deep in a paper as she spoke, replied "Ah yes," absently enough. But Sydney knew his ways. A certain time must elapse before her information would sink into his mind and connect itself with the matter in hand. As a matter-of-fact, it was the next morning before she was summoned to the library to find him attentively conning his friend's postscript. "Did I understand you to say, Miss Lea,

that you were personally acquainted with this- er- Mr. Liston?" he asked her.

"I met him at luncheon a few days ago."

"And where, may I ask?"

"At the Pember Chyne's, Sir Thomas."

"Quite so. You are sure that it *was* the man Sir Hector mentions?"

"There was no doubt about it. We talked freely of this whole matter."

"I see. Now what impression did he make on you?"

Sydney liked that particular question, which her employer often used and in which she felt a subtle flattery. This time she answered it warmly:

"He is evidently a remarkably able man."

"Did he mention this quarrel with the Ordnance Department?"

"Quite freely; he evidently regretted it very much."

"Did he seem to feel bitter or ill-used?"

Sydney hesitated. "Hardly that, I think—I noticed no special bitterness. I think he was just exceedingly sorry not to be of use."

"And do you think he would have been?"

"I do honestly. He has brains and ideas. And then," concluded Sydney adroitly, "he spoke of an invention which he had perfected—something to do with powder, but, of course, he went into no details."

Sir Thomas reflected a moment. It was by these interrogations that he slowly built up the materials of judgment.

"Did he strike you as— er— discreet?"

"That is a little hard to say," observed the secretary with frankness, "he is a reticent type of man, I should say."

"I understand. And do you think you could reach

him in case- er- Sir Hector wanted a word with him here?"

"I think so, Sir Thomas."

"It must be a quite private and unofficial meeting. By chance, you understand? He might just stop in and see you here—casually, you know."

"Yes, Sir Thomas. You think that there are other officials who might resent Sir Hector's communicating with Mr. Liston—after what has passed?"

"You have my meaning," answered Sir Thomas with just a shade of reluctance at having to be explicit, and the subject was closed.

The following letter was written to Ernest Liston that afternoon.

"Dear Mr. Liston:

Do you remember, in our talk together at Mrs. Chyne's table, your telling me of your desire to bring the matter of your invention to the attention of Sir Hector Menzies? Well, I happen to have learned that he has heard about it and might perhaps like to meet you. If you care to drop in to see me here on Thursday week at about four, I think there is a chance that he might look in just before tea. This is all unofficial—but no doubt you understand.

"Yours very sincerely,
"Sydney Lea."

"A very proper note—very cautious indeed!" was Sir Thomas's comment when this letter was laid before him, and he looked at his secretary with an eye that faintly twinkled.

"What born diplomats women are!" was his reflection.

Miss Lea as she posted it on her way home was by way of thinking: "Now, Red Tabs, we shall see if Mr. Romeyne is right."

CHAPTER XIX

ERNEST LISTON was very much surprised at receiving this note from the young lady with whom he remembered chatting so sympathetically at luncheon. He had an Englishman's rooted distrust of feminine advances and this, made as it was in so impersonally friendly a manner, had an exotic quality which he could not understand. His experiences of women thus far had only brought him into contact with their cruder methods of attack, while of comradely kindness free of coquetry, he knew nothing.

Who was the lady? What would she want of him in return? Why should she scatter largesse in the shape of coveted interviews?—to take place, too, in just such surroundings, private and intimate, which were all he could have desired in the way of atmosphere, wherein both he and the potentate he was to meet might express their ideas with ease and frankness. He hastened to Mrs. Pember Chyne in his perplexity, only to find that it made her both amused and indignant.

"My dear boy—this is too much! Haven't you been crazy for six months to meet this man? Surely you are not going to quarrel with it now!"

"Not at all . . . not in the least! But why should she put herself out? What return will she expect. . . . I have neither time nor money to be paying her attention! I am nothing of a ladies' man."

"Attention? In return for this . . . ? But why should you?"

"Well, she will expect some return will she not? Else why single me out?"

Rhoda looked impatiently at him as he ran his fingers boyishly through his furry hair.

"Why? First, I suspect because you are a friend of Walter's and mine and because I spoke to her about you. Second, because you are striving to make your way in the world just as Sydney herself, and that is all the way she thinks of you—as a fellow-worker, in the American sense!"

"The American idea must be very different from ours then!"

"I think it is . . . the relations between the sexes at work *is* different. Men and women are much more on an equality, and their attitude toward one another is apt to be much more comradely. The idea of sex is not so eternally uppermost as it is with us. . . . When I was in the States people told me that sometimes it was not enough uppermost. . . . You know what we are—" cried Rhoda in her fiery, little way. "Englishwomen do a man a favor for only two reasons—to get his money or to rouse his passions. . . . A Countess will not hesitate to do both."

"And as Miss Lea is not a Countess—?"

"You are a horrid little man, Ernest, . . . I've no patience with you. You are more insular than I dreamed!"

"In spite of your hard names, I am impressed by what you tell me. You think that because she is ambitious herself, she had a friendly feeling toward me?"

"I am sure of it."

"And she's not coquetting? Not trying to hook me?"

"No more than if you were another girl."

"Well, we shall see," said Liston; but he did not look convinced. Fate decreed however that the girl herself should drop in that afternoon, quite inno-

cently. She greeted her friend with affection; and extended her hand to Liston with a smile so wholly free from any self-consciousness that he felt ashamed of his earlier suspicions.

"My dear—Ernest thinks—" said Rhoda giving Sydney a cup of tea and a little pat on the shoulder as she did so—"that you haven't any reason for being so nice to him as you have been."

"Oh well, I don't know," turning her head with a smile—"after all, aren't we both trying to make our own way in this world? I'd do the same for any girl or man I know at home. . . . When he's a great power in the land perhaps he'll know of someone who needs a secretary."

"Do you expect, then, to leave your present position?" asked Ernest Liston, who was not a perceptive or quick man, after all.

"Not at all, if I can help it. But Sir Thomas may not want to keep me, you know!"

He was still in the mood to demur a little. "I really hardly like to put myself under such an obligation to you when I am quite unable to—"

"To what? Why, you're not doing that in the least!" she cried, genuinely surprised and opening her large eyes at him.

"The calling on me is just a pretext in order to satisfy Sir Thomas. Why, I may not even be there!"

Liston was silenced, and with the consciousness that here was a new kind of a person. Relief and excitement at thought of the long desired interview which was to be his, took entire possession of his mind. He stayed only a few moments longer.

Of the meeting thus planned, the secretary needless to say, saw nothing but the introduction. She thought that the General, very gorgeous and very affable, noted with a glance of real penetration, the characteristics of the small-voiced and spectacled

younger man. The inventor's manner was a trifle shy and stiff. They went into the study and half an hour later, Liston came out with a quick step and a hopeful ring in the voice that repeated:-

"Thank you, sir! I shall be there!"

He only bowed to her as he hurried away, but she was satisfied. A few minutes later, Easterly and his friend came into the office and continued their talk.

"There is evidently a good deal in it and the matter should be taken up by us without delay . . . The question is how. . . . A thousand pities the fellow got himself in wrong as he did . . . it complicates everything. I shall have some enquiries made at Storey's Gate and then I can talk to the Minister myself. . . . I can't imagine what our people can be thinking of to let all these ideas get by them!"

"My dear chap, you know what they are. And one can see that this fella is a damned independent sort of a fella—"

"What does it matter what sort of a fella he is if he has the brains we need?" declared Menzies, with just a touch of impatience. At that instant, he observed that the eyes of the young lady at the desk, —large, handsome eyes too—were fixed on him with approval.

"Well, well, Miss Lea!" he remarked, showing a row of white teeth, "does that remark of mine surprise you?"

Sir Thomas turned also, and Sydney flushed a little, as she answered:

"I was only so very glad, Sir Hector, to hear you say so—when brains *are* so much needed . . . and when all the others. . . .!"

"Pretty personal in their quarrels, eh?"

"It seems to me so."

"Perhaps they are—some of 'em at least. But whatever this what's-his-name said or did in the year

1905 ought to make no manner of difference if he has the ideas we need in 1915."

"Quite so, Sir Hector," the secretary murmured, conscious of a shade of disapproval on Sir Thomas's brow. She bent again over her work and did not lift her eyes from it, as the splendid, soldierly figure that seemed to radiate energy, success, good-humour, left the room.

"Clever gal, that—Tom—eh?" said Menzies beaming, as he stepped into his car.

One of those most unsatisfactory things in a secretary's life, Sydney reflected, was that it was so often concerned merely with beginnings. After awhile, things slipped away from her into limbo and she heard no more about them. True, a month afterwards, Sir Thomas told her that the General had been much impressed with the tests of Ernest Liston's new powder which had taken place at Newcastle for his benefit. They were to be repeated officially, and Menzies was preparing to press the matter on the attention of the War Department.

Three weeks slipped by and she heard nothing more. Sir Hector went to France and returned. He was very much occupied. As for the inventor, he was so busy, that his visits to the Pember Chyne's were rare.

At last,—after a long time, she did encounter him there and thought that his eyes looked more weary and lack-lustre than ever. He was willing to talk but had nothing to tell her of but delays.

"There is so little news—our people are incredibly slow—they madden me. Some tests have taken place and others are to follow. I should despair if it were not for Menzies. He is splendid and so confident."

"He is confident, then?"

"Oh absolutely! Of course, my previous record is

against me and it is a hard struggle. But then he's a powerful man."

His low tones lightened, thrilled a little. Evidently, the good-looks, the splendor of the elder man; the dazzling, easy kindness which springs so readily from having everything one wants, had won him wholly. Was not this usually the case with a personality so attractive? Too often the case perhaps, with the glamour of a high place, in a country where such glamour still brings reverence?

She recalled that faint curve of the lip with which Adrian Romeyne had alluded to Red Tabs, and her doubt rose to the surface.

"If only he stays with you and sees it through—"

He looked at her askance, that shy wild-animal glance of his, which this time had shock and dislike in it.

"Why should he not? He's too big a chap to be, what you call in the States a quitter. What makes you think so?"

"I hardly know. . . . Sir Thomas trusts him I know, almost as much as he does Mr. Romeyne."

"Almost—but not quite?"

"No, not quite," she answered, colouring faintly as his ironical inflection raised her doubt into higher relief, "but then General Menzies is not a statesman, but a soldier. It is not his business to know so much about character. . . . Then you do not expect a decision for some time?"

"Not before Spring, I fear." He had lapsed into his mild, indifferent manner; and Sydney, when they parted, had the feeling that this only half-human creature had as it were crept back into its cover and was not likely to show itself again.

CHAPTER XX

THE months, great wheels, crushing life and hope beneath them, rolled on. Another year of War had gone by. Prophets and philosophers alike derived very little comfort from the events that had occurred and the world as a whole lived but for the day. The Easter Rebellion in Ireland—strange spectacle of violence and hysteria on both sides—came and passed—together with the amazing finale, when the Prime Minister made to the rebels a pilgrimage of apology and pardon. This was an incident that reassured nobody. Adrian Romeyne had run over to Dublin and returned more depressed than his friend Easterly had yet seen him, although it is true that long before the Irish Rebellion both of these men had expressed to each other—if not to the world at large—their lack of confidence in the present Government. “Of course,” as Romeyne said, speaking with deliberation, “loss of confidence in Government during a War is traditional—but in this case it seems to be more than usually justified.”

Meanwhile conscription had come and men were slowly but surely disappearing from the London streets. Life held a pressure and a pre-occupation which were in themselves new and unpleasant to an unhurried and leisure-loving generation. Things happened. Fear took possession of existence, although the populace showed it very little, yet slowly it began to transform their habits and lend uncertainty to their plans. Incidents occurred which brought home to the English people, living safe and sheltered in their smil-

ing country, the fact there was a novel and malign activity in the universe, which threatened their classic security. Tragedy seemed to stalk across the stage, not singly, but in procession: Men died. One opened the newspaper day after day and there was but one word written on its page. Lord Kitchener, like one of the heroes in Homer, passed to his terrible and mysterious end—in his going, strange and enigmatical as he had lived. There were one or two naval engagements and death, too, was busy on the North Sea. This was familiar and expected by most people, who were graver in their attitude toward the first Zeppelin raids—an earnest of what was to come and ominous to many who yet affected to regard them lightly. Following them, had come a great outcry for defence and reprisal—workmen and soldiers busied themselves with strange machinery in various parts and parks of London; while the evening dusk was stabbed by shining swords of light. In France and in Flanders the duel of millions swayed to and fro. In London, huts and buildings sprung up and blotted out the turf; red crosses marked many stately doorways; hotels were turned into hospitals; motor-trucks ran about the streets; foreign uniforms increased, and one-legged men increased; and hospital blue alternated with the dominant *khaki* color at every street-corner. In Parliament Square, Big Ben was voiceless; and inside the Abbey, mothers came at noon to pray, and great-limbed Colonial soldiers to stare and wonder. Up and down Whitehall, women of all ages ran about with their hands full of papers. Yet who could say that this month of June, 1916, was any nearer to the end? There seemed to be no individual life, or pursuits or ambitions—there was only the War. Men felt as if they had been born with the War, that only since the War had they been sentient beings—and that life before the War—that life of

leisure, and pleasure and personal hopes and fears and avocations, was something which they had read about in the yellowing pages of ancient books. The machinery of the War—here in London at least, filled the air with its clamor and drowned out every other sound.

Yet Sydney had never had more individual perplexities. One of them concerned Hilda Fredericks, who sought her society persistently, especially since Sir Thomas had been made the Chairman to the Aliens Internment Committee. The other concerned Eric Violand. The young officer had been slightly wounded and on leave during his convalescence, and it was not unnatural that he should expect to get everything he wanted. That he should have taken this occasion to fall in love with his aunt's guest was probably not unnatural either, but it filled the object of his admiration with impatience. Just when one was so busy and with matters of real importance, to have this silly boy turn jealous and sulky. It was really too much!

The result had been a real quarrel, during which poor Eric had accused her of heartlessness and ambition, and then, seeing her stand there so cool and untroubled, had rushed on into saying unforgivable things.

"Oh I know its because you think you're running the whole show! You'd be kind enough to me if you thought I was going to help you on. You'd be soft enough if you thought I was an important political chap, or an M. P. or something like that. You'd stroll across the Park with me if you thought I was worth while. You're not heartless to that fellow Romeyne—."

He checked before the sudden blaze in her eyes, and as she left the room she saw the remorse in his face, but she did not stay for his low call. In the

street she had to stand an instant to control her breathing.

As to what Eric meant she knew very well, although it seemed sheer cruelty to give a name to that figure of her dreams. . . . There had been many times when she had to see Romeyne during the past year—occasions in which something he said, something she replied, had brought their eyes to meet, subtle sympathy in her gaze and in his a surprised response. . . . Eric could not know of these meetings. But about a fortnight ago, when hurrying through St. James Park past the new concrete Lake Building, she had encountered Romeyne walking slowly in the direction of Westminister and he had for five minutes, fallen into step beside her. He tucked his stick under his arm and clasped his hands behind his back and moved with that air of leisurely deliberation which only he among busy men could have at eleven in the morning. He talked; and she remembered every word. A brief estimate of the day's news, a hint as to what was likely to come out in the evening papers; comment on Sir Thomas's part in the debate last evening, with a faint subtle flavor of flattery in it for his secretary; an enquiry as to her reading—she had not forgotten. Then at the corner of Bird Cage Walk, he turned toward Queen Anne's Gate and their eyes met. . . . What splendid, intense eyes the girl had! Romeyne was conscious of a thrill of surprise—a surprise which brought with it a touch of disquiet.

Sydney went on to Westminister in a daze. . . . These golden moments . . . that life should hold them! She had never even seen the young officer with his blue band, seated on a bench, and when he mentioned the fact at lunch-time, she underwent marked vexation. She had not wanted any eye to see, she alone wished to mark the passing of that golden moment.

Her mind had played over it and the other moments of the same kind which the Spring had brought her. Romeyne had much need of consultation with his friend Easterly in the library at Charles Street. Long quiet talks followed, during which their voices reached the secretary only as a dim murmur. But there would be that instant when the doors were opened, when he came out. Once or twice Romeyne had been conscious—not pleasurable, but yet keenly conscious, of the woman's face, with great eyes turned toward his entrance. . . .

Golden moments to remember were these. A courteous greeting, perhaps; then she would rise, tap on the panel. . . .

“Mr. Romeyne, Sir Thomas!”
“Oh come in, my dear chap!” and the door closed. . . . Then sometimes, Sir Thomas would be late; and his friend, awaiting him, perched on the fender reading the newspaper, perhaps making some comment as he read. Once or twice, he even talked—freely, picturesquely, in his best vein—and it was surprising how what she replied seemed always to make him feel in his best vein.

“That American secretary of yours,” he remarked to Sir Thomas, “has the great gift of making a man feel how clever he is.”

“She is very discreet,” said Sir Thomas hastily, and Adrian smiled secretly and said no more.

What was it?—the eyes and mouth, the face so expressive of intensity, of power? Once or twice, Romeyne found his mind over occupied with speculation on the subject. Perhaps had he been a younger man—he told himself—he might have tried to determine the quality and depth of that store of talent and temperament. . . . Then the curtain of cynicism descended upon such thoughts. This was only, after all, the charm of the barbarian—of the stranger

woman from beyond the seas. It was well no doubt that work and ambition placed him out of all danger.

Sydney, bending over her typewriter, tasted a subtle exultation of which the sources were as yet youthful and imaginative only. The courteous deference, the winged words—these things she cherished in her heart. Maybe some slight service had been asked of her, "Miss Lea—perhaps you would know—?" And that would be dreamed over, its full joy savored in memory.

All these things had remained vague, intangible, clouded in the silver veils of youth's reticent imagination. Immaturity, ignorance of life, loneliness, hero-worship—these were some of the elements which time might disperse as harmlessly as they came, or which, on the other hand— At any rate, self-consciousness brought pain with it and embarrassment and strong resentment. As Sydney hurried to her work she felt a fierce anger against Eric Violand.

CHAPTER XXI

LUCKILY, her tardiness that afternoon did not matter, as Sir Thomas was not likely to be soon released from the speeches at the end of luncheon. Someone was waiting for him, however, a tall, cavalry officer, whose tunic bore a long row of war ribbons, and who turned towards her with a cat-like swiftness of movement which seemed somehow familiar. His dark face broke suddenly into a smile.

“ . . . So you did get safely to England after all! By Jove,—you know, I've often wondered!”

Sydney had not forgotten. It was the man who had helped her to regain her place in the queue at Cook's in Geneva, and whom she had seen afterwards in the train. She had never lost the impression of his personality. The face, however, which smiled down on her now was thin and worn.

“And you say you are secretary to an M. P.—by Jove, what a turn in fortune's wheel, eh? I say, mustn't we be introduced?”

“We must indeed—my name is Sydney Lea.”

“And I'm Harry Ashburnham.”

“Not really—not *the* Col. Ashburnham?”

“Well, I don't use the little article, myself.”

“But surely, the world does—!” the girl sat down, her hands clasped on her knee: “Isn't this the most extraordinary meeting? You came to see Sir Thomas, of course?”

“Yes, I've an appointment with him. A friend of mine arranged it, who's a friend of *his*. A chap named Romeyne, quite a wonderful chap.”

She nodded eager agreement. "I'm afraid Sir Thomas will be late . . . if you don't mind waiting. . . . And I do so want to hear all about you . . . you know we were in the same train leaving Geneva."

"I didn't know it—how odd!"

"But I never dreamed of seeing you again—nor that you were in the army. You didn't wear a uniform then."

"No, and for the best of reasons. You see the truth was that I had been in Germany and had a narrow squeak getting out. I'd have been there yet, interned or dead, but a countryman of yours—the best ever! He was consul at a little place on the border and he knew a path in a thick wood which had been overlooked. I lay all night in a thicket and slipped over the border in the dawn. A stray sentry shot at me—on the Swiss side, too, by the way—but he missed and didn't try again. I'd a long scramble for my breakfast—and the woods were beautiful."

"And the breakfast?"

"Georgeous, really, when I finally got one." He laughed; his face full of light.

"And then? I mean, since that time?"

"Oh well—just the usual thing—"

"Very unusual, the newspapers thought," said Sydney, "but do tell me about it."

He told her: he was still telling her when Easterly came in at a quarter to four and he broke off and went for a long conference in the library. When he came out an hour later, Sydney was not alone in the office. An elderly person was seated there waiting, a man with a heavy face, protruding lips and drooping eyelids, whose clothes were suggestive of the fashions during the reign of King Edward. He blinked at the tall officer and rose: the secretary formerly ushered him into the inner room. Ashburnham heard the

name: "Sir Jacob Fredericks, Sir Thomas—" and then the door closed upon guttural greetings. He strolled across to the girl's side, smiling.

"I say," he said, lowering his voice, "isn't your friend a Hun?"

Sydney gave a perceptible shudder. "I don't know—oh, I suppose not—" she spoke confusedly as though the idea discomposed her; and the soldier in his quick way, changed the subject.

"Well let's not waste our time on *him*. We must arrange to finish this talk. Fate has evidently meant we should be friends and we mustn't disappoint her. May I come and see you some evening?"

He was so gay, so spirited and friendly, so lacking in those cautions and reserves which she had come to look for among his countryfolk, that Sydney's heart warmed to him. She gave him her address, and she watched him passing down the street with his undeniable touch of swagger—wondering whether he would turn up again. When he did, it was with a manner to suggest that they were already old friends, a manner quite devoid of the condescensions of his sex. He puzzled her and she gave utterance to it in a way that much amused him.

"Surely you're not wholly English?" at which he threw back his head and laughed. Then, finding her interest real and being eager to talk, he gave her some account of himself—opening a new world to her. This narrative occupied many interviews—walks and talks in the Park when the evening band played, tea up the River on a Saturday or Sunday, a play or two. And always Sydney was conscious of no strain in talking with the man, who accepted her work, her place in the world and herself, with a simplicity which came from a wide experience of life.

Harry Ashburnham was a North countryman. He came from a Cumberland family of fighters, lean,

drawn active men as keen and brilliant as their own sword-blades. From the first year of his service in the Indian Army, he had distinguished himself by personal and mental qualities of a high order. Not only had he dash and resource in the field, but his physical vitality and energy kept him at work while other men rested, so he came to have a stock of very special knowledge of great value to his superiors. Cultivating a natural facility for languages, he grew to attain fluent ease in Russian and Persian and many Hill dialects; and even a smattering of Turkish and Chinese. After a wound on the Afghan border, he had been transferred from active service to the Intelligence Department, where his talents were of special use. For several years, his time was spent in strange tasks and travels; and he labored, always in some danger and in dark and devious underground ways. It was said he had been to Lhasa, but how, never was told nor did he tell Sydney Lea. Also, that he had been the only Englishman present at a singular interview between the Tashai and the Dalai Lamas, at which various explorers have hinted, but of which nothing was really known. He had been sent on special missions into Mongolia and to Persia; he had disappeared for months, wearing the yellow robes of a holy man; or turning up on a tramp steamer bound for Trincomalee. The outbreak of war had found him in Germany; and it was altogether characteristic of the man that even in mid-career of narrative, when she all-innocently questioned him as to his reasons for being there, he merely raised an ironical eye-brow and curled a lip at her. But he never answered a word. One felt that the flexibility of this nature was that of steel.

On mobilization, at his own request, he rejoined his regiment and was sent to France with the first detachments of Indian troops. Soon after, a feat of

remarkable personal daring lengthened the strip of gay colors which adorned his tunic and brought his name for the first time before the public. It was a feat important enough to overcome in his case, the hostile jealousy with which the Indian Army was regarded by the British Army and the War Office, an hostility dating from a cleavage of a century ago, but which effectively deprived the officers of the Indian Army from a chance of distinction. Ashburnham's second exploit, in no way less daring than the first, made his name familiar to the whole Empire but it well-nigh cost him his life and he was months in recovering. These were important months because they altered and shifted the balance of power at the War Office, they marked the passing of Kitchener and the end of the voluntary system.

By the time Colonel Ashburnham was on his feet again, the Indian troops had been transferred to the forlorn hope of Mesopotamia. Although he was still in his thirties, he was no longer a boy, and his severe wound had had its effect. The Medical Board refused to pass him for the Mesopotamian campaign. Hence he felt he must find something else to do, "until" as he put it, he could "convince the Johnnies that they were asses." He did not say what the "something" was to be; but there seemed little doubt that a man with so many honours to his credit, even though he chanced, unfortunately for him, to be an Indian Officer, would probably get what he wished. So Easterly must be consulted, and Romeyne, "the dynamo that runs the plant," would set the needful forces into operation.

All this was very fascinating to hear and Ashburnham, as a narrator, had an especial vividness in play of lip and-eyebrow and eloquent gesture particularly his own. He was a strange fellow. At moments no one could be more childlike, his energy overflowing

into wild spirits like a schoolboy, his mind running over with ingenuities and his speech with ejaculations. Beside him she felt utterly staid and middle aged—like an elder sister. He was not in the least like Eric Violand or General Menzies and the other soldiers she had met—matter-of-fact about War and its risks. He was not matter-of-fact about anything which he enjoyed so intensely. He found all danger “perfectly splendid;”—from a night sortie on the German trenches—to killing a tiger single-handed in the jungle—“the only really decent way.” There were moments when she looked at his thin face with its big, high nose, its brilliant eyes and the swift exultation of its expression, with a sort of terror, terror of the things which for him made life, just as they had made up life for the soldier of a thousand years ago.

CHAPTER XXII

THEY became, in a few days, very great friends indeed, and as Ashburnham was not given to concealing his feelings unless his work was involved, his part of this friendship became plain for all to see.

"And so," remarked Romeyne, as he held his stick across his knee, waiting for Sir Thomas, "you have made friends with my *beau-sabreur*?"

His voice, as usual was non-committal, but Miss Lea detected, or thought she did, an undercurrent of amusement. She straightened the sheet of paper on her typewriter and asked quietly:

"Who told you that?"

"I did not need to be told. He is very much taken"—the slight rising inflection in this sentence roused her pique just a little. She did not look up.

"I couldn't believe he was English," she observed, "he is so different from the others I have met."

"Ah you do not know us yet. I can tell you where to find a whole group of Ashburnhams . . . in the picture gallery at Hampton Court. There they are, the fighters of Elizabeth's day—lean and fierce and swift . . . *he* is a survival."

He paused, drew out his cigarette case and lighted a cigarette with deliberation. Then he continued:

"I've known him ever since he was a lad. We met in China where he came to my rescue once, when I ran some risk of being mobbed. Then later on, I was able to help him in some work he was doing for the Intelligence Department. He is a true Duguesclin—is my *beau-sabreur*. Of course the Ashburnhams never had any money and that stands in his way.

There were years and years when he kept after some woman whom he couldn't possibly marry. I rather fancy he thought he could induce her to take the chance. I wonder if he still does?"

The telephone-bell rang. Miss Lea, as she lifted the receiver, was saying to herself:—

"He never does anything without a purpose. Why did he tell me that? I wonder." Out of the struggle at the telephone came finally the voice of Hilda Fredericks.

"That you, Miss Lea? . . . you see, I knew where to find you . . . father told me . . . won't you dine with us on Sunday? . . . Oh do . . . we'll have some music—. Hugo has a new and very old violin . . . yes, one needs cheering up . . . these dreadful days. . . . This set in the Government, who think it helps things on to lock up a lot of people—perfectly harmless most of them . . . Oh I know, but *anything* to end this horrible War!"

Sydney hung up the receiver and glanced at her companion, who had every air of savouring the moment's quiet and his cigarette.

"Mr. Romeyne, of course you know Sir Jacob Fredericks?"

She had bent forward towards him, her brows drawn together and her eyes both intense and sombre.

"I do, yes: what of it?"

"That was his daughter. They have been very hospitable to me—very kind. They have asked me there a number of times. I don't want to seem ungrateful—but—?"

"I am sure you could not be that,—but—?"

"Sir Jacob worries me," she spoke frankly, "and I can't make up my mind whether to bother Sir Thomas about it or not. . . . It is not only that he is constantly asking me questions. . . . He was

in here a few days ago—the same day that Colonel Ashburnham came—and—it was very difficult and most disagreeable. He has a friend—a German, on Sir Thomas's list for internment and he hinted that if I could somehow manage—he didn't say how, to get his friend's name taken off that list—there would be a nice 'present' for me."

Romeyne's face was impassive, only it seemed to stiffen, and he puffed a trifle jerkily at his cigarette.

"What did you reply to that proposition?"

"Why—I did not know what to say—I was completely taken aback. I must have stammered and—seemed very confused." The blood rose in her face at the recollection.

"You have not mentioned this to Sir Thomas?"

"Not yet—I wished to ask your advice about that."

"Well?" It seemed as though he wanted to hear all that was in her mind before in any way committing himself to an opinion.

"Well, you see, Sir Thomas dislikes melodrama intensely. Over and over again I have heard him speak most severely of people who go off at half-cock and get up an excitement. This incident may really be less important than it seemed to me at the time. If he thinks me the sort of person to take what he would call a 'yellow-journal' point of view, I think he would not trust my judgment in future."

Romeyne did not answer, at once; then he spoke slowly.

"I am inclined to agree—to think you are right. My advice would be to say nothing for the present. I reason this way . . . I reason this way. As you say—it may mean little—it may have been only a slip on Fredericks' part; one which he perhaps already regrets and will not repeat. You know how people are—not all are as fastidious as you and I. His mind is not remarkably well balanced. If this is so—if it

is only talk—then there will be nothing gained by noticing it. If not—if there is purpose,—then there are bound to be other incidents and you will have a stronger case to lay before Sir Thomas."

She nodded to show her agreement in his view.

"But remember, you must let me know at once, if anything does happen?"

"Indeed, you may trust me."

"By the way," Romeyne went on after a pause, "I wondered if you had heard—that the War Department is not likely to do anything with that invention of your friend Liston."

Sydney looked up with a shock.

"You can't mean it—? Then the tests were a failure?"

"On the contrary, I believe the tests were a success."

"But I don't understand!"

Romeyne shrugged very lightly. "The man is *persona non grata*, I am told. Years ago, he came into conflict with the W. O. and he showed those chaps up before certain people as so hopelessly inefficient that he made real trouble for them. They are never likely to forget it."

"But General Menzies—has he no power? In the case of a matter so vital."

"Menzies has a great deal of power." Romeyne was speaking in his level voice, which always to Sydney's mind had a capacity to convey shades of ironical meaning which was delicately indescribable. "Menzies has they tell me—pressed the matter rather far. But Menzies is very anxious for a front command."

"Which he is not likely to obtain if—?"

"Which he is not in the least likely to obtain if he uses his influence on behalf of Liston instead of himself."

"And they have kept the man dangling all winter, never meaning—I!" Sydney choked with indignation.

"You see they go on the theory—they go on the theory that if they put one off without a decision long enough, in all likelihood they will not have to make any decision at all. That is just what has happened in this case. I heard the matter discussed at dinner last evening, and I recalled your interest in it."

"My interest in it," she hastened to tell him rather coldly, "was because I thought the invention might help us to win!"

"Very possibly it might."

Romeyne rose: threw away his cigarette, and spoke in another voice. How slight were always the changes in his tone and how significant he managed to make them!

"That fiery look in your eyes makes me ashamed. . . . I know what you must be thinking of the mandarins, and no doubt you are right—no doubt you are right! But Red Tabs is a broken reed for any cause, he has intelligence, but he is impetuous, he hates detail; and he wants a great deal for himself. He will get a front command."

"And Ernest Liston?"

"Ernest Liston must wait—or sell his brains to your fellow countrymen."

While they had been talking the soft summer dusk had closed down upon them. Romeyne wandered over to the window and stood there looking out. A delicate mist floated along the darkening streets. Suddenly, the arch of sky above their heads was crossed and recrossed and glorified by amethyst and aquamarine bands of light. They sought the zenith and rested there, in an ecstasy.

"What a sight!" he murmured, "how full of beauty!"

"And danger," she added.

"And danger," his voice had become uncertain and his gaze turned from the searchlights to rest upon her face. There was silence. Then Romeyne moved quickly away and laid his hand on the electric button. Fantasy and emotion vanished out of the room as it sprang into full light.

"You have done very well, very well indeed, about Sir Jacob. I hope we shall not have to speak to Sir Thomas. There he comes. Ah Easterly, you are late. I have been waiting some time."

CHAPTER XXIII

MEANWHILE, Sydney's perplexities had not been lessened by the attitude of Miss Violand in regard to her nephew. Poor Eric had been forgiven—who could do otherwise? But the appearance, on Sydney's horizon, of Colonel Ashburnham was the means of rousing in him another jealousy much more serious and depressing. Here was a rival whom no one knew better than Eric there was every possible reason to dread. That is, if he were a rival indeed. But was he? To Sydney's mind Ashburnham's interest in her society never overpassed the bounds of that *camaraderie* which she had known between boys and girls in her own home. He was not conventional; he brushed easily aside the various questions of expediency which, to an Englishman, are involved in paying attention to a woman. Like Sydney herself, he kept his mind on essentials. He wished to see her, so he saw her. He came to the house and set Giddy into a twitter of excitement with his name and his War ribbons. Giddy was an ardent reader of the *Daily Pictorial* and she knew the names of all the heroes of all the investitures by heart. He held Miss Violand spellbound with his talk and his gayety and he never even noticed that her nephew sulked in the background. Eric hated him fiercely—not only because Sydney liked him, but because of what Eric called "the damned patronizing air, of the professional soldier toward the new army. This air as a matter of fact, in Ashburnham's case, did not exist; but Eric called him a "bow and arrow soldier," and sneered at him

and vowed that he and his like would lose the War if they could.

Ashburnham never even seemed to see young Violand. He continued to take Miss Lea for Saturday and Sunday walks and out to dine and to the play. So full was he of vitality mental and physical, that her own eagerness and vitality responded. He poured out a breathless stream of ideas, hopes and plans; and if she did not understand them, he promptly set to work to teach her. He had books, languages, studies to suggest enough to make her head swim and he seemed to take the capacity for granted. Life wore to him the aspect of perpetual adventure and though he had a peremptory, hot temper, at least one rarely saw him out of humour. Yet with all this, the girl realized that there were reserves of strength under the glitter and she never asked him for counsel without receiving a store of wisdom, having its foundation in courage. Ashburnham was under no illusion as to success, he enjoyed it, but never depended upon it for his inward satisfactions. One of the things Sydney best liked in him was that he took her work for granted as utterly as he took her ability. All work was "perfectly splendid," and it was only the dull who thought otherwise.

"You know that dear Miss Violand and her nephew," she confided to him, "always treat me as if I were a trick-dog."

"Forever walking on your hind legs? By Jove! I know. My people were like that: but the race is dying out. That boy should know better."

Sydney felt guilty about the boy, but she was not prepared for his next sentence:

"Perhaps that is because he is in love with you, and that is hard on him. If you don't mean to take him—and I gather you don't—you ought to put a stop to it."

"What makes you think—?" she paused embarrassed. He raised his mobile brows and smiled unconcernedly down on her. "Well, of course it's true; one can never tell, but somehow I don't think you'd court a deliberate disaster. You and young Violand don't seem to run on the same track." Then he added with some gravity: "But indeed, you must take it in hand. It's bad for you, because it feeds your vanity,—and its very bad for him. Nothing does a chap so much harm as to dangle on after a woman, with the hope that some day she may change her mind. Particularly because sometimes she does. And then!" he made a gesture, "what sort of marriage would that be?"

Sydney did not answer and he continued: "You see, I know—because for years, I did it."

"You mean you married like that?"

"No: Fate spared me that—or rather, poverty saved me. It was someone I met in India. We were quasi engaged you see, for six years after I was twenty-two. I had nothing but my pay. She wouldn't risk it and take me; but she wouldn't let me go either, and it was in every kind of way bad for me. It kept me restless and excited and unhappy; until I finally broke loose."

"And since?"

"Oh since, I have had my work and I've been happy, of course. There is always something glorious to do in my job, you know."

His companion wondered if everyone would have thought so.

"Tell me some of the more glorious."

To speak of the waste spaces of the world, he never needed urging. As he talked, ejaculating, gestulating, enacting the scene, he called up pictures of wide horizons and great heights and vast forests. The tiny caravan of men that wound over some

snowy pass, or crawled through some steaming jungle or came slowly into the view of some deserted city—in Ceylon perhaps, or Burma, had always to her vision that lean, quick figure at the head. London, England, the Island—seemed very small and unimportant somehow, by contrast. They were the Office—but not the Works. What mattered was the Empire—the wild wide spaces of earth opened, and the savage peoples tamed, and order established—. What mattered *now* in this War was the Empire and the men who made it—the men who had been the self-constituted bearers of the greatest civilizing influence that the world has ever known.

“And you will be going back, I suppose?”

“Oh yes, I shall be going back—not to uninhabited countries—but rather it will be to some country rapidly growing uninhabited—from the War.”

“It will be soon,” she ventured.

“I rather fancy it will be soon.” He evidently had no wish to talk about it, for he changed the subject gaily, as they came in sight of home.

“Don’t forget we are going to the play—next week, mind! By Jove, I shan’t let you forget—I’ll get the tickets tomorrow.”

He wrung her hand and left her, swaggering off down the street. Sydney looked after him smiling and musing. Such men made Easterly—and yes! even Romeyne, seem like the merest office clerks.

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. ROMEYNE's private secretary was an old man named Parker, who had been a clerk in his father's office and was devoted to his master. This devotion, as Romeyne often said, was absolutely his only qualification for the post. Mr. Parker professed a complete ignorance of shorthand, bookkeeping, typing, filing, languages and geography—and if indeed there was anything else which he ought, as a private secretary, to have known, one may be quite sure he did not. His lack of business and technical knowledge was in truth so profound that he was almost fitted according to prevailing standards, to be an Ambassador. Mr. Parker could write an exceedingly well-expressed note with jet black ink, in a very gentlemanlike hand, on thick, cream colored Foreign Office note paper, and he was an adept at sealing the huge envelope with a discreet dab of sealing wax. His personality was marked by a dignified precision, but at the same time he possessed the knack of disappearing into the background whenever necessary. One was very apt to forget about Parker—and in this manner he was by way of learning a number of things which were extremely useful to his employer. There were two young persons under Parker, one of whom was a shorthand typist; but he let no one touch Romeyne's desk but himself, and that desk had never been seen to have an accumulation of papers on it. In fact, any superficial observer who came into Romeyne's office would have set him down as the idlest man in London, for he seemed to spend most of his time in looking out of the window.

It was a hot summer afternoon in which the languid air barely stirred and the sky lifted and broke into a foam of little clouds. Romeyne at the window, looked tired and pale. He had just been having one of those sharp reminders that he was married to a fool, which perpetually brought him up at a round turn whenever the future seemed definitely to smile on his ambitions. His wife had spent some time in visits to a fashionable clairvoyant, who had been shortly afterwards apprehended for some minor infringement of the Defence of the Realm Act. Mrs. Romeyne had evidently chattered: "What about, God knows" said her husband wearily, to himself, "for she knows nothing!" However, she had chattered to such purpose with the crystal gazer, that the frightened Witch of Endor had appealed to her, rather frantically, over the telephone, in terms under which there lay the shadow of a threat. Mrs. Romeyne had sought her husband in a panic, and he, well aware that every man these days must be in the position of Caesar's wife, had to pull a great many newspaper wires which he would far rather have let alone. The whole incident had been distasteful and depressing, and every fastidious nerve in the man revolted, as he stood looking gloomily out upon the new buildings which were going up opposite Storey's Gate. Parker entered noiselessly.

"The lady, sir," he said, "whom we understand is acting as secretary at present to Sir Thomas Easterly, desires to see you for a moment, if you are disengaged."

"Oh? Eh— yes— very good," said Romeyne.

"Show Miss Lea in here." To himself he added: "Fresh troubles, I suppose!"

Sydney made her entry, not without nervousness. Mr. Romeyne set a chair for her and seated himself in another, with that complete immobility and ab-

sence of restlessness which one always noticed about him. His mind seemed to move more swiftly and surely when his body remained still.

"I should not have troubled you," the girl began, "only you told me to be sure and let you know at once if—"

"You mean, Sir Jacob?"

She nodded.

"Tell me, please!"

"It was only this morning. You know Sir Thomas has only been at Charles Street for a few hours each day. He has been very busy with Committees, and the House—and his son in the country. He made an appointment with Sir Jacob yesterday, for half-past eleven today. He certainly told me eleven-thirty and so I have it written on the tablet; but Sir Jacob appeared nearly half-an-hour earlier and seemed rather put out. Well—he asked if he might wait in the library and of course I could not refuse. Also, I was glad because I was afraid that if he stayed in the outer room he might say something more about—"

"I understand. And then?"

"You know that inner door leading from the library into the dining-room? I had occasion to go in there and that door was not quite closed. I could see plainly. He was standing at the desk reading Sir Thomas's papers. It is true I caught only a glimpse but I cannot be mistaken. That is what he was doing."

"What papers were on the desk?" his voice, low as it was, leapt at her, but her answer was quick:

"Nothing whatever of importance. I have always made a practice of putting everything into the safe whenever Sir Thomas is out of the room."

"You are sure about that?"

"I am absolutely sure. As a matter of fact, Sir

Thomas returned a few moments later, and immediately rang for me to get out a letter which he wished to read to Sir Jacob. I looked then and everything was in order."

"Is it just an ordinary despatch box that one could lift without your hearing?"

"No: it is a regular fire-proof office safe with a combination lock. Sir Thomas bought it after I had pointed out to him the disadvantage of the usual despatch box, which might be secretly removed and returned. . . . After both of them had gone out, I went over everything on the desk most carefully. There was nothing whatever . . . estimates for mending the hothouse at Easterly Park, correspondence about a dog; Red Cross Appeals; Lady Tyrwhitt's matinée, and so on."

She fancied that he drew a breath of relief, but his face and voice never changed.

"Of course, taken with the other incident—I feel that Sir Thomas should know, but I hoped that you—"

"Quite so. We shall tell him together. What time does he come tomorrow?"

His manner was very gentle, if a little abstract and he shook hands with her at parting as with a friend. Sydney, running up the Duke of York's steps with a lighter heart, felt remorseful that only a few days ago she had called him an office clerk. After all, what would the Empire be without the Office?

Next day, she told what she had seen Sir Jacob do and what he had said in her hearing, to her employer, with Romeyne sitting by, smoking and inwardly admiring the way she did it. This admiration he did not however exhibit, any more than Sir Thomas exhibited his very real dismay and alarm. The interview lay throughout within the strict limits

of their business relations; and Sydney was thanked, her discretion commended and she was dismissed to her typewriter, without a ray of change having shown itself on the faces of the two men. A very long interview in the library immediately followed and the secretary noticed that Sir Thomas cancelled one or two appointments for that afternoon. She waited with a beating heart for him to come out of the study, but when he did it was only to accompany his friend to the waiting taxi. If he said anything stronger than "Can it be possible?" it was not in her hearing.

As to Sir Jacob Fredericks he seemed, as it were, to disappear from the horizon of Charles Street, and his daughter Hilda ceased to invite Miss Lea to dine or to call her up on the telephone. From that day, a vague portentous opposition raised itself to block every move of Sir Jacob's existence, and to affect every plan made by himself or his family. Nothing definite was said; but people shook their heads when his name was mentioned, and "John Bull" fulminated an article about "Huns in Our Midst" which pointed unmistakeably in one direction. It became convenient for the Fredericks' to remain all the year at their place in the country, and although no actual charge was formulated against them, yet disloyalty was more than hinted, and it was openly said that they were "under observation."

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN the time came for leaving his aunt's house and receiving his final answer, Eric Violand behaved very well and Sydney's heart was lightened. She had been troubled concerning Miss Violand's feelings in the matter—even to the point of hinting that perhaps she had better seek another lodging. Miss Violand's gentle expression at this had looked truly grieved—so that the sentence had ended in an embrace. When Giddy entered her room next morning with a hot water can, she took occasion to remark:

"We 'opes—Miss Helen 'opes, Miss, that you won't think of moving, as we're very lonely now that Mr. Eric 'ave gone—pore young gentleman."

The vanishing from her horizon of the Fredericks acquaintance had given her a little more time for other people. She went occasionally to the Pember Chynes and was often rewarded by an hour in which the dark curtain of the present seemed to be lifted, revealing the shining *mise-en-scène* of the more peaceful past.

A talk with Rhoda Pember Chyne was often like looking through a volume of du Maurier's drawings. Unquestionably, Sydney drew from this source a knowledge of the social and literary backgrounds by which the Twentieth Century was related to the Nineteenth; she came to have deepening comprehension of the influences which had surrounded the formative period of such people as the Easterlys and General Menzies, Lord and Lady Welden, Miss Violand, Romeyne himself, or even Harry Ash-

burnham. She saw this England of the 80's and the 90's—suddenly faced with catastrophe and struggling with a new danger and a new order. She came to realize that what attracted her in these older people was just that background—and that she could never find the same interest in the present generation which lacked it. Eric Violand, the Cairds and those tall young girls she met at Edith Caird's tea-table, had by no means the same individual charm.

She hinted some of these thoughts to her friend Ashburnham the evening they went to the theatre together, and found him curiously responsive.

"I read in a French book while I was in the hospital," said he, "that the world is paying for an excess of individualism, so that now we are roused by danger to just this one overwhelming collective feeling. We are the herd stampeded by the invasion of another herd. It must have been so in the Middle Ages—when the Huns first came out of their forest. Do you remember a little sketch by Anatole France, in which some Italian shepherd in the hills, sees first that long line of barbarians wandering through the valleys—. By Jove—it is wonderful!"

Sydney promised to read it: but added with a half-sigh, that books, except in the line of her work, had lost interest.

"You must not let that happen," was his positive answer. "It never does to slacken up brainwork during a time like this. I shall send you some—and quiz you on them, too, by Jove."

"I don't know which is worse," said the girl, "indifference to books or indifference to suffering. At first I could hardly bear it—but I seem to be growing callous. Perhaps that's Nature's respite, I hope so. At the moment, the main thing seems to be to keep steady, unaffected by all this horror, at whatever cost." Ashburnham understood.

"Yes, the War will blunt one's feeling—if one lets it," he observed; "that is the chief danger. It dwarfs the human atom till he forgets that he is after all charged with force, and that but for that the whole enormous thing couldn't have happened."

Sydney considered. "Sir Thomas was raging yesterday against Mr. Anstyce for saying to him that we would have to live with the Germans after the War—and Mr. Romeyne answered, so tranquilly: 'My de-ah Easterly—it is for you and your Committee to see that *he* does! . . . Then he went on to discourse about all these people in the Government—and what each man stood for and how hollow he rang—and he ended up by saying 'Paradoxical as it may seem—all these negatives make a positive force—and it will disrupt the Empire, if we give it time.' So *he* agrees with you."

"I doubt it—he's a wonderful chap, Romeyne—but much too cynical in his outlook, in my opinion."

The curtain rose on his last words and Sydney was prevented from disagreeing with this verdict. She meant to continue the topic during their walk home but was oddly prevented. No sooner had they emerged on Shaftesbury Avenue and turned their steps toward Piccadilly Circus, than it became evident that some excitement moved the crowds of whom they formed part. Everyone was staring; groups standing about with their faces upturned to the sky.

"What's the matter, officer?" Ashburnham asked, and the man touched his cap.

"The Zeppelins are out tonight, sir," he replied. "You had better get under cover . . . ah, there it is again!"

A slight distinct sound like the popping of a cork was followed by a dim, roaring crash. It galvanized the crowd into terrified movement and a

woman screamed . . . Ashburnham made no comment. Through the masses of people who still for the most part stood about gaping—as if fascinated—he swung his companion forward, dexterously making use of every eddy in the crowd. Those nearest, seeing the tall officer, instinctively gave way before him and in a few moments he had piloted her into the shelter of a near-by vestibule—the entrance, so it appeared, of the Imperial Restaurant. They paused, and then glancing at his companion, he pointed upward to the sword of light which swung across and across, piercing the heavens. A babble of voices sounded in the street. The sword of light steadied and there, suddenly, floating in it, far down on the horizon, Sydney beheld something which looked like a tiny silver fish. . . . It was motionless. . . . Was that another crash?

"It seems to me they ought to bag that fellow," she heard Ashburnham saying; and then came another voice.

"So it's you, my dear chap, is it?"

Romeyne, standing beside them on the curb was looking up also. He was in evening dress and he carried his coat over his arm. She thought, in these queer lights his face looked drawn. The eyes rested on hers with a strange steadiness. . . . She was not sure if she were glad or sorry that he was there.

. . . She stood, watching the Zeppelin, in silence. . . . She was not afraid, but it was natural that one's heart should beat—beat a little faster.

There were not many people inside the Imperial Restaurant. A word from Romeyne and they were seated at table "because it's obviously the best thing to do," as he said. Waiters hurried about; everyone looked a little nervous and alert, Sydney thought, except her two companions. The lights in the room seemed very big and bright. None of the restless-

ness of the streets penetrated to where they sat. One could not be sure even, that one heard another crash. She tried not to think what that noise really meant—the deliberate dealing of death, the purpose behind it.

. . . A wave of fury passed over her and the quiet room seemed to vibrate with her emotion. How fantastic, how bizarre it seemed!

She became aware that her host was looking at her with a touch of concern; and she answered the look. "No: I am not afraid—but I am so angry! . . . Are they human beings—as we are?"

"Devils gone mad," cried one man. "Products of science without character" added the other, very quietly, "but Ashburnham, you were saying?"

"I was saying that Miss Lea and I had been talking about the causes of the War earlier this evening, and I wondered what your idea was?"

Romeyne smiled his slow smile. "Among the causes I've heard considered," he said, "I remember an excess of individualism and an excess of the other thing; a scientific reaction and an emotional reaction; an economic collapse or an economic rivalry; the intrigues of politicians and the will of the people. Do you want any more? Because Miss Lea is trying so hard to choose between these explanations that she is forgetting to eat."

Sydney recalled herself with a start. "It wasn't because I was trying to choose," she protested; "it was rather that I believed in all of them but was trying to decide as to the proportion of each."

He made a gesture. "Do not try—for who are we to decide? As Ashburnham says we are only human atoms in the grip of this tremendous current of crowd feeling. That is the real cause of the War; that we are human atoms and that there *is* this herd emotion. . . . Generated in one great impulse,

it sweeps over the world and we are not ourselves until it is passed."

"But if that is true," the girl asked, "what is to prevent it from starting again? What is to make this the last War? or to keep us from having other Wars in future?"

Romeyne was amused.

"Whoever suggested that there would be no other Wars in future?" he said, looking at her.

"I told you, Miss Lea," said the soldier, "that he was perfectly cynical."

"It seems to me" said Sydney, absorbed, "that I should make it the duty of the future to see there could not be! If I were a statesman, I should mould my policy to that end and if I were a writer, I should make that my one theme. Our ideas about these things do change and improve our convictions!" She glowed with an enthusiasm very rare in her which lent her face an intensity admired by both her companions.

"You are an idealist," said Romeyne gently, "like all Americans."

"I am beginning to believe that Colonel Ashburnham is right and that you are a cynic!"

"I am in the employ at present of His Majesty's Government," he tranquilly asserted.

They were both speaking with a certain directness having a background of earnestness, which denoted a change in their attitude. Sydney was not wont to speak to Romeyne as an equal and in the light touch and freedom of her speech there was no trace left of the secretarial manner. Harry Ashburnham, watching her, drew his expressive brows together, half perplexed, half admiring. She bent her dark gaze straight into Romeyne's, and held him. At the moment he did not seem able to take his eyes away.

"They say that it is Mr. Romeyne who forms the Government's policy on most subjects."

"Ah? And they say that Sir Thomas is much influenced by his private secretary!"

The little duel ended in a laugh and Sydney turned her smiling eyes away. Ashburnham broke in—seeing his chance—"By Jove—then—I wish you'd form it to some sense about the East!" and Romeyne took up the challenge.

The two men were soon deep in talk each according to his manner; the statesman wise rather than brilliant; the soldier brilliant rather than wise. The girl, as she listened, seemed to be carried in an aeroplane over wide continents to far horizons. Romeyne knew Europe from Land's End to the Golden Horn and Ashburnham knew Asia from Tokio to the Urals. Personalities, as diverse as picturesque, stood out on their geographical background. Then Ashburnham launched into vivid narrative about the Indian troops and their strange devotion and though he turned his face toward his host, yet he drew her attention by the tail of his eye. . . . The lights in the room were still big and bright, but they swayed no longer.

. . . She bent toward the narrator a face whose pallor and modelling seemed overnight to have achieved beauty, distinction.

"She's always intense," thought one of Sydney's two companions; "tonight in her attentive stillness, she has become beautiful."

A waiter came up to their table . . . Romeyne recalled himself from the talk with a start . . . it was closing time.

"The trouble seems to be quite over, sir," the waiter said as they rose.

The streets were emptying fast, the faint starry sky was pure and untroubled, as they came out of the restaurant. A cool little wind had arisen.

"I hope," the girl said anxiously "that Miss Vio-land has not been worried."

"You will reassure her in a few moments" said Romeyne, as he bade them good night. "Fortunately for myself on these occasions," he added, on an impulse for which he found it afterwards hard to account, "there is no one to be worried in the least about me." He turned quickly toward Piccadilly and was lost to view.

"You know that's very odd—I never heard him even distantly allude to *that* before," remarked the soldier as they crossed Regent Street. "He and his wife for years have been practically strangers."

Sydney murmured something.

"Of course it is his own fault, but still—"

"I don't see why you think that," the girl spoke quickly, indignantly. "I have seen her—she is perfectly odious."

"Quite so—but she did not propose to him you know. Responsibility always must be the man's. I knew her at one time, and even I—only a lad then knew she was the wrong woman. She had money . . . and he had no ideals. . . . It never does, believe me," the soldier continued, "to marry a fool."

He began to speak of something else and she was glad, because the picture of Romeyne's empty house—and the vacant face and tasteless appearance of the woman she had seen—gave her a feeling of disturbance.

Romeyne, meanwhile, walked rapidly in the direction of his house in Smith Square. He was very tired, he told himself, and strung up after a hard day—or he would never have said that. . . . When one was so tired . . . it was hard to keep from feeling lonely. . . . It is not good for man to be alone . . . particularly in wartime. He tried to change his thoughts back to gen-

eral matters, but the personal kept intruding. How beautiful the girl was tonight—the jewelled eye and eloquent lip, the whole face, vibrant, bent on his own! . . . Odd, he had not noticed it before.

. . . She must have improved. Until recently he had just approved of her as very clever, and tactful and hard working—now, her personality had suddenly sprung into vividness in his mind, so that he kept seeing her face and movements with a keenness that was like pain. Clearly, it was because he was overdone—overworked; he must go away. He dallied with this idea for an instant only to thrust it savagely from him, he knew he would not go away. And then Ashburnham, was he very much attracted? He, Romeyne, had always liked and admired Ashburnham—had pushed him forward whenever possible, but now—was it because of nervous fatigue that he had become conscious of resenting Ashburnham? What a pity if that talented girl should become interested in a man whose life was so uncertain and hazardous—subject to all the chance of war and his own temperament. And he had no money—it would never do! The life she should have he knew very well and how she would become it—he could imagine how she would develop; what a hostess she would make with her gift of attention, how she would throw herself into a man's affairs, and above all, that rich intensity—. How on such a night as this, perhaps, when he returned late and there had been danger—she would be waiting there—on the stairs no doubt, with glowing eyes and parted lips, and he racing upstairs, his whole thoughts would be turned toward what awaited them—that heady joy. . . .

Romeyne put the key in the door as he reached this point and the silence of his house struck the vision away as with a blow—what a sickening mess life

was! And how unstrung his nerves must be. After all, why should the affairs of Ashburnham and Sydney Lea matter to him? He stood for an instant in the hall and then went into his library and turned on the lamp.

CHAPTER XXVI

"My dear," Edith Caird greeted her friend, "I've asked your man!"

"My man?" Sydney repeated, mystified.

"Yes. . . . I mean Colonel Ashburnham. Roger has known him a long while, but I met him for the first time last night. We had a little party at the Café Royal. . . . My dear, he's a wonderful man—quite fascinating and evidently awfully taken with you!"

"Just the same, I don't like that possessive pronoun!"

"But why, my child? Isn't he your man of the moment? (I'm so glad you put on that American frock this afternoon. It's so becoming . . . how wonderfully they do that kind of thing over there!) One has to have a man of the moment and you never talk any more about that queer little creature who used to make high explosives. You've given him up."

"It's the other way about; he's given me up. Ever since Sir Hector Menzies went off to his command in France, Ernest Liston has avoided me. He doesn't want to talk about being thrown over—and he knows I had my doubts from the first."

"Doubts of his horrid old T.N.T.?"

"No, Edith: doubts of that—that flamboyant General!"

"Menzies is very highly thought of, my dear. They say his division is to be in this new offensive. though I will say that Roger is *not* enthusiastic."

"Well—I am not surprised."

The drawing-room at Hans Place was cool and fresh. Midsummer sunshine lay on the grass of the square without and gave brilliancy to the red striped awnings and to the painted garden chairs. Within, the black and white walls were refreshingly neutral and Edith had hidden her brilliant winter colourings under the summer dress of pale lavender chintz.

"Since we have to stay in town so late," she declared, "we will look as summery as possible."

"And don't you miss your inventor?" she went on, to tease a little; but Sydney's eyes were sombre.

To her mind the Liston case had an aggravated injustice in that the only black mark against the man was that he had been proved right! . . . And Menzies—that splendid figure, that tall, smiling, gorgeous embodiment of the man at the Top—how he had fulfilled himself in her eyes! These thoughts stayed with her and made her a little absent and silent all during Ashburnham's visit—though he was more interesting than ever. She kept thinking how he too, but for a fortunate chance, might have beaten his wings against the bars until all that fine, spirited vitality had become broken and embittered—. As for him while he jested in eager conversation with Edith Caird, his quick glance travelled now and again to his friend's face, and noticed the cloud upon it. They left the Caird's house together and stepped into the sunshine, which "summer time" had deluded into lingering upon Sloane Street. Ashburnham suddenly broke forth:

"It *is* an awful thing—this Menzies fiasco."

"This *what*?"

Her voice and face were supremely startled, so that he made a sound of vexation.

"I thought you knew—there! I felt you seemed thoughtful this afternoon and that Sir Thomas had told you. . . . I am sorry!"

“Sir Thomas has been out of town for three days. . . . I have heard nothing. What is it?”

“An ugly story. I got it at the Club but it must be all over London by now. . . . The same old error of giving a Front Command to a man who has done good work at a desk in White-hall! Menzies was a brilliant chap but—”

“Is he dead?”

“Not that I know of.” She could see that he hated the subject, but could not leave it alone. They crossed Knightsbridge and entered the Park before he explained and even then it was with reluctance. To himself he said that there was nobody else to whom he could talk on a subject so painful but Sydney Lea was a wonderful friend. There was no sense of her being an alien to trouble this intimate moment—only a deeper consciousness of sympathy.

“Well—you have been hearing on all sides that an offensive was planned? The way everybody talks about these things is perfectly appalling no wonder the French think us naif. . . . At all events, the offensive was planned to start off yesterday with an attack by Menzies’ division I can’t give you details and there are all sorts of rumours flying about, but so far as one can tell he omitted the most elementary precautions in supporting his attack—balled up things behind the lines into a hopeless mess, and wound up by turning the barrage fire on our own men.”

She fixed her eyes on him in a pale horror. This bald account of indescribable confusion, rout, defeat, betrayal, death,—what a picture it raised in her mind!

“And then?” came her low question.

“Then the Huns came back—they were quite ready you may be sure. Luckily, the French were just around the corner nothing very im-

portant has been given up, but of course some terrain had to be sacrificed."

"But General Menzies—?"

"Relieved of his command and recalled. There will be an investigation and lots of talk—after the harm has been done."

"And then what will happen?"

"Nothing."

"You mean—"

"Just what I say—nothing! That's what always happens in England." She heard him draw a moved breath and add as if to himself ". . . Thank God! I shall soon be out of it all!"

By the impatience and pain which the subject roused in him, the dramatic intensity of his expression was heightened. He looked more than ever like some fierce restless bird just plumed for flight. She felt vibrantly how he longed to take wing; to be again on active service and out of this heart-wringing chaos of offices and *bureaux*.

"Don't let us talk about it . . . , " he burst forth impetuously, "it's too horrible . . . I'd never have mentioned it to you but that I was sure you knew it already from Sir Thomas!"

"Poor Sir Thomas!" Sydney murmured. Her companion made a gesture of finality and assent.

She felt the blow to her employer's pride was the blow to her friend's also. So she changed the subject by referring to the grace of a passing child, who danced upon the path, and the soldier's eye was soothed. He looked at her gratefully. His was a nature consistent in its simplicity and very much under the influence of anyone to whom he may once have given his confidence.

During the next week she had another reminder, if such were needed, that she was not in her own country. Sir Thomas returned to his work in due course:

she waited for him to say something about the downfall of Sir Hector, but he never did. The incident caused him an acute pain, so that he never of his own motion alluded to it again. Many months afterward, when he went away for a week, he gave his secretary without comment, the address of Menzies' house in Scotland and she knew by that only, that he held to his old friendship. At the time, she noticed that his face looked a trifle less calm and ruddy than usual; she thought that he stooped a little. What a toll these three years had taken out of his life, his secretary reflected, watching day by day the work of this high-hearted and steadfast gentleman,—the fate of Tom, the fate of Hugh, and now, worse by far than invalidism or death, the fate of his best friend!

Sir Thomas went about his daily task slowly, steadily, powerfully, like the Englishman he was, carrying his head just a trifle higher for each fresh strain, loss, disappointment, that he or his country met. If no danger could make him hasten his pace, neither could it make him relax his routine. If he and his like were insusceptible to new ideas, they were insusceptible to panic also. If he was slow to change his methods, he was slow also to lose confidence. He stood, in Sydney's mind, representative of that English morale, the most unconquerable quality of the human spirit, by whose aid he would continue all his life the task of making bricks without straw.

The Menzies débâcle remained one of the heaviest blows which had befallen him; but in the next few days, this, and all other anxieties were swept aside by the news of the Somme offensive and the hourly danger to his son Middleton, in France.

CHAPTER XXVII

A WEEK later, when all the world was hanging on the news of the battle, and when to the Easterly family, Middleton's brief letters from the Front constituted the hope by which they lived on from day to day—in the midst of this racking suspense, Harry Ashburnham came to Sydney to bid her good-bye. He did not say where he was going or on what mission, and he spoke most vaguely of his return. It was evident that he was glad to be off. He was a fine, eager creature, any inactivity chafed him. She gathered, however, that the job was the one he had specially desired and that he owed it to Romeyne's influence. He said he would write to her if possible—but feared he would be cut out of the way of the mails for a long time. One was not even to know if he were going North or South, East or West, nor what the day nor which the railway station. It was "orders" that he should depart as mysteriously as he came.

Sydney was sorry to have him go. They had been such "pals" as he called it, their talks had been so unconstrained, she knew she would miss that friendship. There had always been something strong and helpful about the man; she had felt toward him almost as toward a fellow countryman. Suddenly, in that London world she began to feel lonely.

"And so you miss the *beau-sabreur?*" asked Romeyne, in that intonation whose very unmoved suavity held a touch of irony.

"Very much, indeed."

"Ah you are not a philosopher about such encoun-

ters, I fear. Life is made up of meetings and partings—of people who come into one's existence and then go—which is bad;—and of people who come into one's existence and then remain, which is worse!"

"You speak very bitterly."

"I have cause—I have cause," he answered rapidly as though hurried along by some unexpected impulse into candour. He was standing by her desk, frowning, and she saw him make a distinct effort to recover that measured calmness of speech which was his—and she saw him fail. "I am feeling particularly bound—harassed just now—my house oppresses me—I envy Ashburnham that he turns his face toward freedom—he turns his face toward freedom, while I am in this squirrel cage!"

"I am very sorry," was her low rejoinder.

"Are you really—are you really sorry?"

The contrast between his own moved utterance and his past somewhat sententious habit of speech seemed to strike and shock him. He straightened himself and the second effort to be usual, succeeded.

"But don't let yourself miss the *beau-sabreur* too much, he is an uncertain creature—and he moves hither and yon at the whim of the heartless War-Office. Your happiness does not lie there."

"Why should you concern yourself—about my happiness?" She raised her eyes and they rested, steadily on his own.

"Why—I wonder?"

There was an instant's silence in which she felt that one must go on speaking—yet knew not what to say. Finally some banality about Ashburnham's being so like an American came to her rescue. There was relief in the half-laugh with which it was received, and which seemed to restore the normal vibrations of the atmosphere. Sir Thomas came in just then with Middleton's last letter in his hand and the

two men plunged immediately into earnest talk. Sydney bent over her typewriter and told herself that for once in her life she felt really tired.

These last weeks had been very full. Sir Thomas had been both troubled and anxious. His boy's danger, the blow to his pride in the fall of General Menzies had made him worried and discouraged. He had come to depend upon his secretary more and more—the duties which she now undertook for him were far heavier and more important than those which Bolder had ever even attempted. They required skill and penetration which she herself could not have possessed a year ago. On the impressions which she received of people and the estimates of character she formed, her employer openly relied. In all that labyrinth of party politics and national muddle, where democratic principle struggled with aristocratic privilege, where passionate individualism opposed itself at each turn to collective effort, Sydney journeyed, keeping her hand on the thread of character and circumstances. Her reports were couched in terms as candid as they were shrewd,—Sir Thomas read them with a twinkle in his eye. Sir Thomas rarely laughed, but he frequently twinkled at his secretary's opinion of people and things. When Sydney wrote of one elderly functionary:—

“A nasty old man—he would have massacred the Armenians if they had only been heathen!” or of another in a phrase borrowed from Romeyne:—

“The sort of bureaucrat who thinks that if he only puts off deciding anything long enough perhaps he may escape having to decide it altogether.” Or of a third:—

“He is a combination of pomposness and sensuality which would do credit to a Zulu!”—

Sir Thomas raised his eyebrows, but he believed her.

"I am not at ease about this young man who has applied for the post of special clerk to the Committee," he might observe, when she presented herself before him in the morning; "it is not clear how and why he claims exemption and someone says his mother was Austrian. Do you think you can find out the real state of affairs for me?"

Miss Lea replied that she could, and set to work in the slow, quiet and diplomatic manner by which alone—she came to know—such things were to be ascertained. A careful, chance encounter with an affable underling in some accessible bureau—a pleasant word in passing, with old Parker, while one was waiting in the outer office for Mr. Romeyne's signature—perhaps, a respectful enquiry of the fellow Committee-member who had strolled into Charles Street for a word with his colleague—these bits of information could be fitted together so as to form a dossier to be laid before Sir Thomas.

Since the incident of Sir Jacob Fredericks, it was evident that she had greatly risen in her employer's estimation. Moreover, English confidence once given is given without reserves. This added to her responsibility and there were moments in Sydney's day when she was both terrified and exhilarated at the trust reposed in her. The War, and all of Sir Thomas's work which had any connection with or bearing on the War—had an intense fascination for her—seeming to change the face of the so-called stable universe while she looked. Sydney was almost ashamed of this excitement, but it existed and in more minds than her own.

She was pleasantly aware, too, that Lady Easterly had come to share her husband's attitude. He had told his wife the Fredericks story and she was appreciative, showing it to the secretary in a hundred ways,

chiefly by treating her as a valued member of the family, to be consulted at every turn.

"Americans are such a help!" she would say; standing in the doorway with that imposing erectness and splendid, elderly good-looks which Sydney found so attractive. She would even call up on the telephone from the country to ask about her husband, "Was he all right, or did Miss Lea think he was overworking? Would she not use her influence to make him come home for a week-end?" And so on.

On a rainy Saturday evening at the end of July, Sydney sat resting and reading in the little drawing-room. Miss Violand had gone to spend a few days at the sea—near to the coast town where her nephew was stationed. Sydney slipped into a house frock; she dined alone, chatting with Giddy, and she wrote a letter to Elizabeth. It was delightful to be able to sit down to one's book for a long peaceful evening, well-earned. She did not hear the door-bell ring, and she looked up in surprise when Giddy entered the room bringing her a note. Giddy's ample form shook from her haste—there was a man, she said, who was waiting for an answer. The envelope was in Sir Thomas's hand and its contents ran as follows:—

"Dear Miss Lea:

"You have so many times during the past month given me proof of your fidelity and devotion to our cause, that I do not hesitate tonight to ask of you a very special service, which in no sense comes under the head of your secretarial duties. The reason I ask it is because of my confidence in you, but you are in no way bound to accede to my request. If, however, you are willing, as I hope, to be of very great service to the country at large, as well as to myself, please accompany the bearer of this note—as quickly as you can—to the place where your task is to be performed.

He is a subordinate and must not be questioned. The matter is too grave for me to be more explicit in this letter; you will of course receive a full explanation in due time. You must prepare to be absent from your lodging until tomorrow. I feel sure that I can count on you: as on your complete silence respecting this communication.

“Yours very sincerely,
“Thomas Easterly.”

She read this astonishing note carefully twice.

“Will you tell the bearer,” she asked Giddy, “that I shall be with him in a few minutes?”

“But you will never be going out this rough night, Miss?” was Giddy’s exclamation; and Miss Lea laughed and said “*Orders, Giddy!*” as she held Sir Thomas’s letter to the candleflame and watched it consume.

Her preparations were brief. She changed her dress for a street frock of serge and she put a few necessaries into the big pockets of her service over-coat. Somehow, the tone of the message gave her a feeling that bed, that night at least, was not to be her portion. There was work to be done—what work?—where? As she descended the stair the clock marked a little past eight. Giddy, leaning over the balustrade, watching her depart with flurried anxiety.

The messenger, standing just inside the passage, wore a chauffeur’s cap and a long black mackintosh. To her few words that she was ready, he bowed in silence, and preceded her with alacrity and deference to the street, where a large and handsome car stood drawn up to the curb. He opened the door for her and then, after wrapping a heavy rug about her knees, he slipped into his place beside a second man who was driving, and in a breath the whole equipage glided off into the wet night. A turn—they passed Berkeley

Square and turned up Davies Street, a twist,—they had crossed Oxford Street and were running north. In the thick soft rain and darkness Sydney saw but little, she knew only that presently the motor settled down to that hum of steadily maintained speed which showed they must be travelling on one of the main arteries of London.

The incident had passed so quietly, so swiftly, that she felt as if in a dream. Darkness had covered the insignia upon the panels of the car; but it was a large limousine, and she knew that such cars were growing fewer every day. She searched inside for some hint as to the owner, but there was none. . . . The two men sat like wooden figures on the other side of the glass pane.

What a strange adventure . . . Damp mist-filled air, raw, rather than cold, blew against her face. By and by, it bore country odors, rising from wet earth and dripping hedgerows, fallen roses and the pungent later-blooming flowers.

What was likely to be required of her? She speculated in vain, as they ran on, and on. That even, purring speed of a powerful engine moved them, noiseless and effortless, pausing perhaps at some cross-road, only to spring forward again. Mile after mile; on and on; London is vast indeed; but even London was left behind. They were in open country; running between high hedges or past darkened cottages. The rain diminished, then ceased; the pure sky shone out, with a faint star or two glimmering and a church steeple piercing it here and there. The air became warmer, perfumed, pleasant; she began to grow uneasy, troubled, because they went on so fast, so steadily. . . . A long time passed. Then a slowing down and a sudden turn to the right, with a flying glimpse of huge iron gates topped with armorial bearings, . . . made her heart beat. They

were running under the trees of an avenue. Nearby were shrubs: pungent, aromatic. The horn blew. There was an instant only to glance around her—and then the car slowed and stopped before a house which stretched out into long wings and white arcaded terraces, with tall vases on them. Scarlet geraniums overflowed these great vases with a flame of colour. . . . The front-door opened and light streamed on the steps. The chauffeur opened the door of the car and helped Sydney to alight.

An elderly, wooden-faced man servant standing before her, indicated that she was to follow. She obeyed, noticing that he limped a little. They stood in a long hall which traversed the building, and was distinguished by one of those curved and hanging staircases to be seen only in houses of a certain period. Rugs lay on the marble floor, masses of flowers stood about. The furniture was heavy and huge. She was struck by the silence of the place . . . it seemed absolutely still. . . . The butler preceded her, limping, to the other end of the hall and knocked at a door. Then opening it, he ushered her within, announcing her by name. The room was small and square, lined with books; there were lamps, a little fire took away the dampness from the air. A man, who had been sitting beside it, rose and came eagerly to meet her from the shadows of the room—but this man was not Sir Thomas Easterly. It was Adrian Romeyne.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"YOU!" she cried, bewildered.

"Yes, but do not look so troubled. . . . Sir Thomas understands; it was his idea that we should ask for your help. . . . It is all right. Come, sit down—put your coat there—are you chilled with the long ride?"

He took her hands in his and drew her gently to a chair near the fire. His face was moved, stirred, as she had never seen it. The touch of strain, of excitement in it communicated itself to her own.

"What has happened? Where is Sir Thomas?"

"You shall hear all as soon as I can tell you. Are you comfortable, meanwhile? Would you like a glass of sherry, a sandwich perhaps?"

She shook her head with a gesture of impatience: and Romeyne, walking up and down the room as he talked, but keeping his voice level and aloof, began to explain. His explanation was long and deeply interesting, so concentrated was she that her eyelids never quivered as she listened. Through it all, she was intensely conscious of the intimacy of the moment, that he turned to her and laid the matter before her; that it was *she* he desired to help him; that it was *she* who actually was helping him. That was the vibrant background to his story.

Romeyne said that upstairs in a room of this great house there lay a woman who had been found guilty—irremediably and avowedly guilty of treason and betrayal. She was a young woman hardly more than a girl, but, young as she was, her life had been already indelibly scarred with the tragedy of folly. Daughter

of a well-known man holding distinguished political office, she had made, just before the outbreak of War, a marriage regarded as entirely suitable, with the son of another prominent family, a boy of her own age. The suitability had been chiefly material, but there had not been time for her to be very bored with this rather dull young man before the hour came for him to go off to France. At first, the emotions of that time, his danger and the like, seemed about to avert the catastrophe which their friends had seen preparing, and perhaps if he had been wounded and returned—a fresh current of sympathy and affection might have brought them together again. But he was not wounded, and early in 1915—a year or more ago—this young woman went off for a week with another officer, in one of those casual connections, rootless and brief and sensual, which seemed, in her parents appalled eyes, to link her with the beasts that perish.

The husband was young and loyal; her betrayal had been base. Proceedings were at once started for a divorce, and while they were pending, the name of the co-respondent one day headed the list of killed. Perhaps—if he had lived and cared for her—perhaps—if her mother's final illness had not been hastened by shame and sorrow—the last act in this drama of horror and despair might never have taken place. At it was, the girl found herself tossing like sea-weed on the wildest waters; for her father, rigid and unforgiving, marked his displeasure by cutting down her allowance and seeing her as seldom as possible. The London world not unnaturally followed his lead and the sinner suffered an ostracism which she found pitifully incomprehensible. If her allowance of money had been larger, she might have bought toleration, but there is small place in society for the woman who is both besmirched and poor—. Gambling might be a diversion, but it did not tend to increase one's income.

—particularly, when among the people with whom she played and to whom she lost most frequently, was a certain South African gentleman claiming to be of an Amsterdam family, and known as Mr. Ludwig Leo.

Mr. Leo was not a diamond king; in fact his means of livelihood were not clearly defined; but he was very well aware that the girl who looked so frightened when she lost, was the daughter of an Ex-Minister and the niece of a Minister in power. Mr. Leo saw possibilities in the acquaintance and he was very good-humoured indeed. He tore up one of her little I. O. Us.—with that pleasant smile of his; and she was so much relieved that, when he telephoned the day after and asked her to find out a trifling matter for him from Uncle Jack—just to settle a bet—she really could not refuse. So she found it out from Uncle Jack—without very much trouble, and passed on the information to Mr. Leo. It was a trivial detail concerning some battleship or other; and Mr. Leo was so grateful at winning his bet, he made such a matter of it, that one quite liked him—evidently, though vulgar, he was a good creature. Mr. Leo continued to be grateful,—and one afternoon, finding out how things were, he insisted on lending her a little money till next quarter-day. As he said, she had already done him a favor and one good turn deserves another. So one simply couldn't refuse, after that, to help him by finding out some little thing whenever he asked it.

Unbelievable that this had gone on for weeks and the fish had not felt the hook! When the demands grew more insistent and brought uneasiness—by that time, the girl was deep, deep in a morass to which there seemed no way out. One must go on, because one could not turn back, Mr. Leo saw to that. Mr. Leo commanded a complete submission to her father,

which softened him sufficiently to lead to a visit home—especially as he saw how pale and strained the girl was from remorse, and how sleepless. Once she was at home, Mr. Leo found little things that she might do for him every day or two, and if she objected—there were always reminders of what had been done, and of the money owing, and of the newspapers—all of it in a kindly sort of way of course; but the suggestions in themselves were enough to send one into a chilly shudder of fear. Sleep went; and the nerves went, and the drugs one took revenged themselves next morning. And the thought of Mr. Leo stayed with one every moment of the day and night—.

"Don't look so distressed," said Adrian, stopping at this point to look down on the girl in the chair, "your eyes are so big—its a horrible story, I know."

"Have they caught the man?"

He made a gesture of despair. "Alas, no! He must have slipped away to Holland when he found the thing could not be kept up any longer. Some minor member of the gang got into trouble and Leo had to run for it. We don't know how exactly—but it is supposed a Dutch trawler picked him up from somewhere on the coast. He was only one of a group—the cleverest—and they had been very well organized. But when the cog slipped—then this came out and that brings me to the point." He paused, looking about him for a chair, then drew it near to her and lowered his voice. She kept her eyes upon his own. The house enfolded them with an absolute, palpable stillness.

"We know that all their plans must have been admirably laid. They had many sources of information, just how many remains to be discovered and they covered their tracks so well that Scotland Yard is not very sanguine. If it had not been that one man became frightened—an Austrian portrait-painter

with an Irish wife, whom the P. M. refused to let us intern,—if he had not suddenly taken fright and given out a clue,—why it might have gone even further. And as it is, it is bad enough. . . . ”

“So of course they sent for you . . . ?” He threw out his hands with a little gesture. “Think! Think what it is! The people who own this house, her father, her uncle. . . . Think what this must mean to them! Already her uncle has gone up to Town, and his resignation will be in Government hands tomorrow. . . . As for her father, how can he ever hold up his head again?”

“They are trying to save her . . . ?”

“They cannot possibly save her and they know it. It is not that. But there is the scandal, the newspapers, the political situation generally. . . . I do not need to tell you,—to tell you how very shaky the Coalition is, and how restive the public—how dissatisfied. . . . An incident like this, if it becomes known, means a crash . . . and we are in the midst of a terrible battle in which our losses have been appalling. Think of our Allies, of France, of the terrible blow to confidence at home!”

“I understand.”

“You would, I know. I do not exaggerate,—I do not exaggerate when I say, that this occurrence may do more harm than the Irish Rebellion . . . if it becomes generally known.”

“But if the woman is punished,” Sydney said, her voice falling softly on the strained anxiety of his, while his gaze sought comfort from her face, “how can it possibly be helped . . . ?”

“Ah, there are ways. . . . There are penalties and penalties. Her father and uncle may have no wish to save her from the consequences of her crime, nor to save themselves, but I have pointed out to them, (they are both old friends of mine,) I have

pointed out that they must save the country. . . . I came down here early this morning and we have been conferring. . . . I believe now I have most of the threads in my hand and can control the situation, except—”

“Except . . . ?”

“That is where you come in, where my confidence in you comes in. You remember I told you she was but one of many victims? We know that and we know that others are involved. To save a crash we must get hold of the rest of these traitors at once.”

“This woman then?”

He was standing beside her chair with his hand on the back of it. No stolidity or serenity could hide the pain in his face or the trust in the eyes he bent towards her. Her own exquisite response quivered—to meet it.

“She has been keeping up chiefly by chloral and brandy, and she has no nerves left. She lies upstairs in utter collapse, a whimpering, shrieking, hysterical wreck. How to get out of her what she knows? We’ve tried all day, but she clings to her silence. This man, Leo, must have frightened her so thoroughly, her sick mind can hold no other idea. . . . And you see how vital it is. . . . And time is flying, a whole day has been lost. We know that information, of one kind or another has been steadily trickling through them. It is believed that even perhaps K.—”

The idea smote Sydney with such horror that Adrian, noting it, paused a moment. Then he went on:

“Every hour, every moment adds to our danger; and to the chance that they may all escape. Yet she will not speak. So they came to me and told me how they had failed because of her condition, and also they felt that she must have a nurse, lest she kill her-

self—before she speaks. And that must be prevented, though I for one could not blame her."

"Nor I."

"An ordinary nurse was not to be thought of. Then I had an inspiration—the thought of *you*. So you see. I told them I would provide someone whom we might trust. I called up Easterly and after some persuasion he was willing to write you the note. It was the only way."

"I am to persuade her to speak? But—"

"Persuade, threaten, anything. Alone with you—a woman—surely, she will yield. Time is the only thing—I fear that tomorrow will be too late."

"She must speak tonight?"

"She must speak tonight."

"Then let me go to her at once." She saw his face lighten and was repaid. Their hands clasped.

"You are splendid—as I knew you would be," was his low answer.

The butler with the grave face and the slight awkwardness of gait was standing in the hall as they came out. Romeyne addressed him with an impressive authority of voice and manner.

"Morton, can I count on your help, tonight?"

"To the utmost of my power, sir."

"Very good. You must remain here in the hall—even if it be all night—until Miss Lea calls you. You can arrange a chair and rug?"

"Quite easily, sir. And when Miss Lea calls?"

"You are to come for me at once. I shall be dressed—waiting in my room. But you must not leave the hall on any pretext whatever."

"I quite understand, sir."

"Have you given my orders that no one is to approach or to leave the house?"

"I went to the lodges myself, sir, and the gardener with the two old fellows will be on guard all night."

"And the telephone—in case his Lordship calls up?"

"They will keep the exchange open all night, sir, and report the line 'engaged' to anyone except his Lordship."

"Excellent. You can take Miss Lea to her room." He turned to Sydney.

"You will find a nurse's uniform there. Ask for anything you may need."

She bent her head in assent and followed Morton upstairs. Romeyne stood below in the hall, his eyes fixed on her—his face drawn and white in its anxiety. Sydney's chief feeling was that of exhilaration.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE whisper from the bed died out in a moan. The nurse bent down, straightened the pillow, unclasped the clinging hands, wiped the wet forehead, repeated, for the hundredth time:

“If you would tell me—if you would only tell me.”

“Oh God, God!” the moan came as before, and then again and again, “Oh God!”

. . . How long the night seemed . . . the peaceful, perfumed night. . . . Fresh airs came in at the window, a bird stirred sleepily, calling to its mate. She could hear so many soft, delicate sounds intermingled on that background of exquisite silence—the drops from a distant fountain fell, one after another, in a musical, monotonous patter—repeated hour after hour as her question was repeated.

“If you would only speak—they all want you to speak. Will you not speak and save yourself?” But only the Name, so far, for answer.

The room had been shrouded in greyness when she entered: and it remained in greyness. All beyond the circle cast by the little night-light was in shadow. It seemed vast, with vague corners and menacing shapes of furniture. It must be luxurious. That pallid square over the mantle was a mirror, the smaller objects nearby evidently photographs. A wardrobe stood open with vague draperies falling out of it . . . once the nurse had stumbled over an open dressing-case—evidences of a sudden mad impulse to flight. . . . One could picture that frenzy, and the steps in the hall outside, and the pause, and the knock—loud, peremptory, like doom. Had she

shrieked out at its coming? Or had she stood, frozen, the eyeballs gleaming like those of a trapped rabbit, while their burden slipped out of the futile hands? Sydney turned her gaze from this dreadful vision to look out upon the sky which showed infinitely pale and clear, not dark, only dimmer than the stars. The trees moved on the horizon, like seaweeds in a current. . . . But one must not linger . . . the night was hurrying on. . . .

That object against the window was the toilet-table. There were all sorts of small things on it—owned by the girl who babbled and moaned on the bed. Just a young girl after all, piteously young. She lay there as if every bone in her body was broken. In her incoherent despair, she turned her head from side to side and long shudders went over her body. . . . She had shrieked until she had no strength left to shriek. . . . The saliva dribbled out of the corners of her mouth. Yet she resisted—terror kept up her resistance; and from some inner store of strength she resisted, hour by hour. . . .

It was cruelty—nothing but cruelty to torture her so! Sydney felt a wave of nausea at this spectacle of suffering—increased suffering—which she must not alleviate, but renew. The perpetual slow rack of questioning—iteration, repetition, threat, persuasion, command; vitality beating against vitality, will clashing on will. . . .

When the victim did not call on God, she begged, sobbing, for silence, for rest. . . . And she could have no rest. . . .

The house seemed to hold its breath . . . the night seemed to race on soundlessly, inevitably. Yet Sydney felt dawn could not come, in all its purity and inspiration, while that woman lay upon the bed; she belonged to night, she was a part of night. . . .

“If you will only answer me, then you shall sleep!”

Still the head mechanically shook; moans and cries came from the lips, the limbs were twisted almost as in a convulsion . . . was she becoming unconscious? The nurse bent over her, soothing, steady-ing; and the eyes that met hers still held knowledge, resistance. She gave a dose of stimulant, and sat silent, holding the girl's hand in her own.

This then was Evil. This was in the realm of Satan. One had imagined somehow that the Devil's Kingdom had vanished into the shadows of medi- eval superstition, together with other terrors of the past. Wickedness was disease: it lay in the province of specialists and one was to regard it with pity. Wrong was simply the negative of right: the other side of the same picture, having its roots in these complicated social and political injustices which legislation would in time simplify and adjust. Wrong was perhaps another point of view about things—such as the German idea of War.

The world was full of light. There may be dark corners still, but only the sick lived in them. . . . Such had been her code. But now! She saw that these things actually were—that these horrors existed. This woman lay on the rack where weakness, and disloyalty and vice and brandy and chloral had brought her! She was not diseased—her resistance proved that she was uncommonly strong and well. She had all the education and protection and care and affection possible to give. She had no abnormalities, —but there she lay in the power of Satan. This then was Evil—and it was not an imagination. It was a terror and a peril which were incredibly and awfully real.

“You must tell me for your own sake. It will help to atone—it will rid you of this dreadful secret—then you can sleep!”

Sydney's own voice sounded harsh to her ears. The

woman answered her, praying for morphia, for brandy, for something to dull the fear, to veil the sharpness of despair. She turned her face to the nurse like a child and begged. She whimpered. She knew nothing—she said—nothing at all. The nurse held up before her the hypodermic syringe which the doctor had left—she bent over the bed. She poured upon the poor creature all the concentrated power of her own vitality to compel.

"You will tell me? You will tell me everything?"

Not yet. The woman feigned deafness or pretended unconsciousness. Her lips were obstinately shut.

Were those steps outside the door, that paused, that moved away? Romeyne perhaps, growing impatient: one *must* not disappoint Romeyne. He had said that the morning might be too late. . . . After all Romeyne and Sydney were working together for England, fighting with her back against the wall—England betrayed. What young lives may have been uselessly spent because of the girl's sin? Sydney's heart stiffened. One should not think of the girl—she must yield. One must remember the baseness of disloyalty toward a tradition and an instinct sprung from the essential stuff of humanity. The struggle must go on.

Hours passed. Steadily now the pressure of Sydney's voice, of her demand, beat the other down. . . . Pauses fell, pauses of exhaustion for them both. . . . Vague indefinite movements sounded from within the house . . . the air from the window grew chilly. Surely, the sky above the trees was lighter—translucent silver?

And then, in the dawn, she spoke. . . . The words dropped from her lips in faint gasps. Sydney, standing by the window with pad and pencil wrote steadily. There were names she asked to

have repeated. The narrative filled her with horror, so that her fingers shook. She questioned: writing the answers. . . .

“You met them at Leo’s—once? twice? . . . “That telephone number was? . . . “You felt convinced that she had been caught as you had been? . . . “Mostly through your uncle’s *secretary*, Mr. . . . Belby, did you say? “Yes? I didn’t catch that. . . .”

The voice ceased. Sydney lifted the girl in her arms and thrust a pen into her fingers. Then laying her down, she pressed the hypodermic needle mercifully home. The tortured sobbing slowed, died away, the clutching hand relaxed. Silence. Grey dawn filled the room, and when she looked out of the window, she heard the thrushes beginning their song.

Was she in time? She left the room holding the paper tightly in her hand. . . .

The long corridor blazed still with electric light, and Sydney blinked as she fronted it. . . . With an indescribable shock, she suddenly became aware that a man was standing a few feet off, staring at her. He was an unknown man; slight, pale, in evening dress, and his face wore a fixed, disquieting smile. She noticed that he moistened his lips before speaking.

“Has she told? Has she told—everything?” At the words he made a panic step toward her—terror and cruelty shone in his eyes. She made a spring and raced for the stairs, the paper held to her pounding heart, the nurse’s veil flying from her shoulders. . . . In an instant she stood beside the sleeping servant and shook him by the arm.

“Mr. Romeyne! Get Mr. Romeyne—quick, quick!”

He was not gone five minutes, but Sydne^y strung to the pitch of terror unspeakable—kept her eyes fixed on the stairs. Would the man come down it? No. When Romeyne appeared, the stillness broke into sudden activity, confusion, sentences begun, not finished, begun again. . . .

“There was a man!” . . .

“What man?”

“But I do not know—he tried to take the paper from me—he looked like murder.”

“The paper—you mean she has confessed?”

They were standing again face to face in the small room which they had quitted some hours before. Romeyne almost snatched the confession from her hand and she heard him give a stifled groan as his eyes ran down the list of names.

A moment later . . . he had moved to the telephone—then he was in the hall, giving instructions to a footman. She could hear the answer.

“Very good, sir: I’ll take my bicycle . . .”

Sydney found her way to a chair. She felt shaken and weak, so laying back her head, she merely waited. The house moved now, pulsed; doors banged, steps hurried down the corridor. Romeyne was still at the telephone. Someone knocked and entered. It was Morton the butler, and Sydney noticed that he was trembling.

“We went to Mr. Belby’s room, sir. But he was not there—he’d shot himself sir, just outside the dining-room window.”

“Is he—?”

“He is dead, sir.”

Romeyne set down the telephone receiver.

“Poor devil,” he said, and then, “Do what you can, Morton: I’ll be there in a few minutes—but I must speak to his Lordship first,—yes, operator—don’t they answer?”

He was back again at the telephone before the butler left the room. . . . So the man had killed himself, had he? He must have been the secretary from whom so much that interested Mr. Leo had come. Had she not heard his name before? She thought vaguely for the recollection but failed to find it. She could not seem to feel the horror as she ought . . . she was too tired.

But when Romeyne finished the call and came towards her, she stood up as a private comes to attention in his officer's presence. Her face quivered. Romeyne's pupils were dilated and he gathered her icy hands into his own.

"I knew it! I knew you were wonderful! What can I say—how thank you for this night's work? Yes: it was in time—I feel sure of it—no one in the world but you could ever have carried it through."

She tried to reply, but she was overdone and for a breath the room spun and she was in danger of falling, but for his arm. His eyes were looking deep, deep into her own . . . his mouth quivered. What wave engulfed her at his touch—sweeping her close into his arms, against his heart, while his voice called brokenly upon her name? Always, in that passionate moment, she was conscious of novelty—of bewilderment.

A sound of a door closing upstairs. . . . Steps in the passage—the whirling room steadied. Romeyne released her and she saw that the exultation in his face had given place to pain: embarrassment. He made a gesture half of despair, half of dismissal, and she instinctively obeyed, moving to leave the room just as Morton limped back into it. On the threshold she looked back. Romeyne stood by the mantelpiece, his face hidden in his hands. The telephone bell rang loudly. . . .

BOOK IV
THE BEGINNING OF THE END

CHAPTER XXX

HUGH EASTERLY, passing his thin hands over the wheels of his chair, moved himself into the shade of the giant cedar that shaded the terrace. The August afternoon was full of warm breeze which seemed to exhaust the boy more than actual heat; and he put his head back on the cushion with a movement of restless impatience. Overhead, an aeroplane circled in the sunshine, humming, and Hugh, as he looked, knew just how it felt to guide the 'bus on a day like this—just what it meant to shut off power and slide down the long slopes of air. That's what he himself might have been doing, this very afternoon if—.

Through the glass door of the morning room his mother came out on the terrace and walked towards him, in her black dress. Before his injury, Hugh had not been given to noticing things about his parents, but at that moment she seemed to him very straight and imposing, very splendid altogether, though certainly since Tom's death her hair had grown whiter and her step slower. She drew her chair near to his in the shade and took up her knitting.

"Dad come yet?" Hugh asked.

"I've just been speaking with him on the telephone," said Lady Easterly, "he will be here for tea, I hope. But he's very much put out because the invaluable Miss Lea has broken down and gone away to rest."

"How very boring for him. I can imagine how he hates it. I thought Miss Lea was supposed to

be one of those wonderful Yankee machines that never run down."

"On the contrary, to my eye the girl has been looking badly for some time. I told your father so, only last week, but he would not listen to me. He's very dependent on Miss Lea and says she is the best secretary he has ever had and of course he is overworking himself as well. But at all events, she has had to go—somewhere into the country, I believe, for a fortnight or more."

"Perhaps," Hugh suggested yawning, "it will force him to rest too."

"That's what I hoped. . . . But at the moment there seems to be something on and he's very much upset. . . . I don't think he's quite been himself, Hughie, since Hector Menzies . . . Well, and now a Minister has resigned and a great many rumours are flying about . . . he said he would tell us more when he came home."

"It would be a deal better for the nation if the jolly lot of them resigned, I think," was Hugh's verdict.

"Well, you know, dear," said Lady Easterly mildly, "most of us don't think so.—There! that's the telephone again?"

She hurried into the house and it was ten minutes before she reappeared.

"That was Dad once more," she began looking troubled, "he won't be out after all, until tomorrow."

"Did you ask him what the row was about?" enquired her son.

"Yes: but you know he never talks about such things over the telephone. But he *is* put out. He tried to get hold of Adrian, and Parker tells him that Adrian went last night to France."

"Some F. O. job, I suppose."

"Quite so: but your father doesn't understand it. He said Adrian ought not to be absent at this time. . . . It appears there is something serious, some scandal in this resignation. He spoke very gravely, and of course he complained that it was frightfully inconvenient to carry on without Miss Lea."

"Damn Miss Lea," said Hugh violently; "I wish she wasn't an American!"

"But my dear boy, why?"

"Oh, mum, because I do think they are behaving so very badly. After the *Lusitania*, we all thought that they would do something, but they go on just the same filling their pockets and taking kicks from the Kaiser. People of our blood and speaking our language—and thinking only of the dollars they can make! It has made me simply sick!"

"I agree—at the same time there is no reason at all for feeling that way toward Miss Lea," protested his mother, "especially when she has proved that she feels just as we do about it. She stays in England for no other reason, she told me as much. And lots of nice Americans over here feel the same. You haven't seen as much of them as your father and I have. In the Red Cross and all that—why they're wonderful. Janey told me that when Mrs. Willoughby Kent sent a request to New York for a subscription for her work shop—making those *pa-pier maché* moulds, you know, for facial cases—they cabled her *a thousand pounds*—like that! Without even a question!"

"I don't think that makes it a bit better."

"We don't know all about the political situation there, either, remember. Things in the States are different—they've a very large foreign population."

"That's why I don't trust any of 'em. Once a

Hun always a Hun and once an American always an American."

"Well, but, Hughie, once an Englishman always an Englishman, too, I hope!"

Hugh only grunted. He had these sudden irritations nowadays—caused perhaps by the neutrality of the United States—perhaps by the disobedience of his Aberdeen terrier. Any opposition caused them. The doctors said it was a phase of his nervous condition, that it would pass as he grew stronger. Argument and so on should be avoided.

His mother glanced at him in concern. There he was, after all, alive—and though the face was pinched and the eyes pain-darkened and the wheeled chair held legs almost useless still,—yet he was there, he was alive and at his age the doctors held out hope of a complete recovery with time. She changed the subject and although his replies were listless, yet he did not utter any further fulminations against the Americans. Lady Easterly had rather intended to remind him of what he owed to the suggestion of one American and the treatment invented by a second—with a Hun name, too!—but thought better of it. Moreover, she had a leaden feeling that, in Hugh's opinion, nervous invalidism in a wheeled chair might not be the same subject for congratulation as it seemed, at times, to his mother.

Shadows lengthened as they sat together. With the tea-tray and in the wake of Smith who bore it, Janey appeared, very tired, but quite cheerful, after a long day of hospital scrubbing. She brought a newspaper, wherein the Cabinet Minister's resignation, for that issue, took precedence even of the Somme offensive. Certainly, there were a great many rumours afloat and it was even hinted, as Hugh read aloud, that a member of the Minister's own family was involved in his fall—the same member at whose

divorce proceedings a year ago, the presiding Justice had made, from the Bench, some unusually caustic comments. Hugh speculated and seemed interested, and even Janey—who knew little about politics and cared less—asked questions, but Lady Easterly did not enlighten them. She knew about the girl of course, but she had always thought it a horrible story.

CHAPTER XXXI

SYDNEY, too, read about the resignation of a Cabinet Minister, as she lay out in the fields on that same soft and breezy August afternoon. She was still living in the strangest bewilderment; conscious only of a profound sense of illusion, moving, speaking, thinking in its penumbra—as a person who has been insensible moves and speaks before the full return of consciousness. She was completely disoriented: her mind occupied with certain memories, visions, ideas, so new, so poignant, that it was filled to the exclusion of everything else. Her old self seemed pushed, as it were, to the door-step, and the door shut. There was another occupant within. To a girl of her type, the upheaval caused by sex emotion is far greater, because it has not been waited for, expected, taken for granted, as it is with many women. Sydney had had no masculine relations in her life which in any way differed from feminine relations. Her dreams on this subject had been very vague. She belonged to that group of young Americans who make a cult of comradeship.—The girls are proud of being “friends” of the boys: the boys are proud of feeling “no nonsense,” about the girls. Marriage is rather assumed to be an extension, qualitative and quantitative, of that ideal.

Nor had there been anything in Sydney's experience to prepare her for this revelation. Certainly, Eric Violand's half sulky, rebellious affection held no enlightenment. Her friendship with Ashburnham had not been touched with emotion at all; if it had, she would have enjoyed it less. In regard to Ro-

meyne there had been a long and subtle preparation of hero-worship and admiration; the delicate flattery of his appreciation, the melodrama of the moment, the task which she had performed with him and for him, responsibility, secrecy shared between them, strain, hour, touch, passion. The tide that had swept her into his arms, seemed still, to her imagination to beat and to harry the poor fragments of her self-control. But if she felt the tossing of these broken fragments in place of her steadfast and continuous will, what about Adrian? She had one letter from him, a letter showing in its incoherence, its pride and its uncertainty, the humiliation of a man who knew he had lost control. It was not a letter hoping anything or asking anything. He took upon himself all the blame for that sudden outburst—"which, from one placed as I am to you, was nothing less than an insult," and he craved forgiveness. She thought too, reading between the lines, that he craved oblivion.

"I refuse the responsibility of spoiling your life; mine is already spoiled" he wrote; and again: "I cannot claim that I feel the slightest sense of obligation or of loyalty toward the woman who bears my name—but I cannot pretend either, that I feel no loyalty toward my work, toward the position I hold in the world. You are not one of the women, nor I one of the men—to whom passion is everything. At such a time as the present, individual happiness simply must not count—renunciation is a matter of *noblesse oblige*."

She knew he would not have been Adrian Romayne if he had not seen the barrier of class, of caste and of tradition which lay between them. Also she knew,—she had been more than a year in England—that it was not marriage, however obtained, that Adrian meant when he spoke of renunciation.

Strange it was, the recurrent thought always, that it was his work that lay between them! How had she changed from the old days! What would her aunt, Mr. Hansell, Elizabeth—have thought? It was the fact of marriage alone which would have counted in their eyes; and she had moods of desperate humiliation that she could not feel as they did; as they would have expected her to feel.

She was young and she suffered; the revelation thrilled her soul; passion was keen within her, she suffered. Adrian, with just instinct and wisdom, had written the truth and she clung to that truth. She was not the woman nor he the man to whom passion was everything. Ambition and love of power were the ruling forces of his life; mental activity, independence, order, were more to her than to the majority of women. The only companionship which they could hope for was one bound to thwart the natures of both. Tolerant as his world was of evil, it was quite intolerant of imprudence. Whatever you did in your private hours, you must not *afficher* yourself. Being the creatures they were, they were certain to *afficher* themselves, and his career would suffer. "It is better as it is!" she would tell herself; and then longed fiercely for whatever misery life might bring, if it brought only love. She could do nothing as she lay upon the grass, but pray for the passing of that agitating vision.

She tried to divert herself with the countryside, that country, which for centuries, has interpreted painting and vitalized poetry. Beautiful it was, though drooping as it had not drooped for a thousand years. The empty villages seemed to await the return of their sons; the little churches, holding aloft their appealing spires, bore on their walls a shining brass tablet, fixed above the stiff effigy of a Crusader, to witness the passing of his descendant,

a Crusader no less glorious. On the outskirts, children and reservists worked at their allotments in the abundant harvest. In every field, one could watch the building of fat, golden ricks, the flocks of crows quarreling over the stubble, and the young Rosalinds of the land army bending to their tasks. The "glory of the garden" was but dimmed; and for the first time Sydney seemed to feel the roots of her own being stretch down deep into its soil. From this parcel of earth she drew those obscure vital forces which alone count in the ultimate destiny of human beings: those forces of race and nationality, of hereditary tendency and custom, which make civilization.

The thought had a soothing quality, and soothing also it was to drink in this pure soft air, watch the slow passing of sunshiny hours and walk about the quiet meadows, while she strove to regain the self-control and security of mind, that had been so violently twitched out of the grasp. She tried to read, to study, but with less success; books, at the moment, had lost their power.

But life, though its pages are so often left unfinished, has a way of adding a paragraph later on, putting in long afterwards a detached sentence, so that *finis* to an incident is really never written. Fate thus threw in Sydney's way an encounter which would have been purely amusing, if her whole nature had not been so profoundly stirred and tense that any touching of those strings brought pain.

She had been strolling through the village to which Long Green belonged and she noticed a cyclist standing at the door of the Cross and Keys. Something about his figure, which was strong and pudgy, his flat, round face and sharp eyes, seemed familiar—but only when he came forward and greeted her in a cordial, if lisping voice, did she realize it was none

other than her countryman, Mr. Gaultier Delaplaine.

"Why, Miss Lea! Whoever would have thought it! England is surely the most amazing island—and the most romantic!"

"There's no romance about me," said Sydney smiling, "at least, at the moment," she added.

"Is there not? Well, I'm not at all sure—" said Mr. Delaplaine, "Are you living here? I didn't know Sir Thomas's place was hereabouts."

"It isn't. I am here resting at a farmhouse."

"And your M. P.? How does he get along without you?"

"Quite well, I assure you. But you—are you still successfully keeping the War from disturbing your peace of mind?"

There was just that delicate chill about her question which he remembered and remembered also, that he had decided she was a person with whom it was best to be frank.

"Not so successfully," he observed, tilting his bicycle inside the iron fence and turning so as to fall into step beside her, "in fact, I have about made up my mind that it is a mistake to try." Sydney felt her dislike of the man somewhat lessened by the speech, but she was by no means convinced.

"Really? And to what extent?"

"To the extent," rejoined Mr. Delaplaine, clasping his hands behind his back and speaking confidentially, "that I've applied for a job in the munitions factory— Oh I've changed," he added "quite a little since I talked with you. At one time I thought of going home to the States—but then I felt sure from all I was hearing from my friends there it would jar, so instead—but listen, are you busy? Or may I walk with you? Because there's a great deal I have to say."

Sydney acquiesced. She was reluctant, but curious

as to what this strange individual might have in his mind. They strolled on together, leaving the road at the next stile and crossing the field into the shade of a wood. Although Mr. Delaplaine had declared he had so much to talk about, yet he apparently found it a little hard to begin.

"Our friends the Fredericks seem to have come a most awful cropper, haven't they?" he said at last somewhat abruptly. "Apparently, they can't even leave their place—Have you seen Hilda at all?"

"Not at all," she answered and went on clearly and slowly. "It became so very plain, you see, why they had made friends with me—Sir Jacob made so many advances and attempts beside those which they had made through *you*; that I didn't feel as I should have felt to real friends in misfortune—I felt merely glad to be rid of them!"

Her reply seemed to embarrass him and his flat face turned red. "What do you mean—advances through me?" he proffered awkwardly.

"I think you forgot that I was a compatriot," Sydney said gently.

"I always felt that Hilda underestimated you," he finally acknowledged with candour.

"Both of you—all of you—did that."

"But you're quite wrong, Miss Lea, when you say 'all of you' as though I were one of them. I never was. Sir Jacob had been awfully decent to me, and its true that but for him when the War came and the *Aesthetic Review* ceased paying, I'd have been down and out. Hilda, too, she was a good friend to me. I told them, and kept telling them I thought they were mistaken about you, y'know; and I didn't believe you were the kind they thought, but I couldn't refuse just telling you what they wanted when they asked me. . . . Of course, I never dreamed

why, and I never thought it would lead to all this.”
“That I quite believe, Mr. Delaplaine.”

“I suppose you think I’m a perfect Hun, and God knows what?”

“No,” she answered, “I think only that, like too many other writing people, you’ve refused to realize this War at all—the danger we are all in—we Americans most of all.”

“I never was pro-German!”

Sydney very rarely allowed herself the luxury of a quotation, but in this case she knew how to meet Mr. Delaplaine on his own ground.

“*Non ragionam di lor,*” she murmured, “*ma guarda e passa.*”

Mr. Delaplaine nodded, almost meekly, and they walked on for a few yards in silence, while he evidently digested his mortification. That this was honest she could not doubt; and yet she was by no means fundamentally reassured.

“Well, I only want you to know that I knew nothing about what they were after,” he repeated, as one repeats an apology. “I could see nothing disloyal about the Fredericks, and I rather supposed I was putting a good thing in your way.”

“Such a good thing, for example,” she swiftly and sweetly answered, “as that pistol which your friend Mr. Belby put to his ear in the dawn?”

This observation had an absolutely stunning effect on Mr. Gualtier Delaplaine. He stopped dead still in the path, turned entirely white, and when he walked on again, it was with the mechanical and irregular step of a man who has received a severe shock.

“Miss Lea,” he said in a breathless voice—“how, in the name of God, did you come to know that about—about poor Belby? I could have sworn that not a human being in the United Kingdom but myself knew

the manner of his death! It has been kept a dead secret."

"I know. I was there."

"Where—where he died?"

"Yes."

He muttered a "My God!" and wiped his damp forehead. His companion was however already repenting having said so much, and for other reasons than because she was convinced that his emotion was sincere. She spoke more kindly.

"I ought not to have said that no doubt. Yes: I feel sure that you had no part nor parcel in the doings of Mr. Belby. But you did admire him, when you should have known better. I'm glad you are going into the munition factory, Mr. Delaplaine."

"I am glad myself," he replied, a trifle hoarsely. "If I had my doubt—this talk ends it."

They had come in sight of the cottage gate by this time and Sydney held out her hand to him. Mr. Delaplaine shook it, but his own trembled.

"I am inclined to think," he observed, "that you *are* a remarkable young woman after all!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THREE weeks rest and change of air accomplished their purpose; her nerves steadied once more and she began to sleep again. A letter from Sir Thomas showing his real need, found her ready.

After all, work is the only true sedative. The only safety and health for the soul was to throw oneself once more into that intricate and incessant machinery. . . . She knew work would never seem quite the same. Life was full of these unfinished pages, and there were times when Sydney felt that Destiny was turning them a little too breathlessly.

Sydney arrived at Easterly Park, and was met by Janey with the dog-cart, and that shy friendliness which was so particularly Janey's, and which also, joined as it was to reticence, made her the most English member of her family. The two girls were decidedly curious about one another. Sydney, wondering if Janey ever spoke what was in her mind; Janey wondering about the conversation she had heard that morning between her parents.

"I suppose," her mother said, "that Miss Lea, being an American, will dine with *us*?" And Janey had been rather glad when her father answered, "Oh yes, of course, quite so,—" because that prevented Miss Lea from having her dinner on a tray sent up to the nursery, as her governess used to do. At the same time, she had been a little perplexed as to why being an American made such a change in these established customs. So she asked Sydney direct and cautious question about that supposed paradise of young women—the United States. To some of which Syd-

ney, laughing, answered that she could not pretend to answer. They got on very well on that occasion, and Janey was glad the secretary had arrived.

Tea was in progress on the terrace, when several hours later, after finishing some letters, Miss Lea came out a little shyly and joined the group. Lady Easterly smiled at her over her knitting. Janey sat near Hugh, who, bending forward in his chair, was teaching his dog to beg for bits of cake. Very pleasant to look on was the emerald turf; the comfortable, low-windowed, ivy-draped house, the brilliant flowers, the dark shade of the great cedar. A bluish mist veiled the outlines of the trees on the edges of the park, and a couple of swallows did what Hugh called "aeroplane stunts," skimming low over the lawn. Sydney drank her tea, feeling the restful leisure of it all. In her white dress and her pale face, with her dark hair and darker eyes, she herself looked like a black and white sketch in the midst of all that color.

"Really, the girl is lovely." Lady Easterly reflected and could not help glancing, somewhat anxiously, at Hugh. Presently Sir Thomas came out, waving the *Evening Standard* in one hand and the *Westminster Gazette* in the other, and they saw that he had good news.

"The D. S. O.! Donald has the D. S. O.!" he cried and saw the color deepen in his daughter's cheeks. Donald was the young Master of Lochiel, whose interest in Janey Easterly had recently been rather pointedly ignored by her parents, because they had fear in their hearts. Everyone in the family was delighted to hear of Donald's luck and Sir Thomas read aloud the notice in his precise voice, with his eye-glasses very far down on the end of his nose.

"It's just *too* splendid," declared his wife, but her hand sought her boy's for a moment and in that

pressure was a sympathetic comprehension which he valued the more because she showed no trace of it in her voice.

"By the way, I heard something else today which is not yet generally known," remarked Sir Thomas. "Of course it is not unexpected. Adrian is to be in the next Honour's List—he is to have a Peerage. I lunched with him today just before he left for Scotland."

"Not really? How very interesting! What title will he take?" asked Lady Easterly, much interested.

"It is a Barony, I believe, and he will be Lord Waveney."

"Why, but then," said Hugh, "he will have to go into the Lords. Beastly shame, I call that—it's the back shelf, covered with dust."

"Not at all—not at all!" asserted his father warmly; "the Lords have been the only active chamber during the War. It is ridiculous the way you younger men talk and think about them."

"Maybe, but it's true," Hugh rejoined coolly, helping himself to cake. "I believe in aristocracy, you know, Dad, and I want the world made as unsafe for democracy as possible—" this with a side-glance at the American present—"but the aristocracy I want has got to be a younger and more active body than the Lords. I'm truly sorry for Adrian and I'm surprised too. No doubt they put him where they think he'll be out of the way."

"The present Ministry will not stay in power forever. And Adrian has always had the confidence of both parties. I don't agree with you at all about shelving him," said Sir Thomas, "but we must wait and see."

"Dad has become the perfect Asquithian lately," said Hugh, but he laughed a little and the sound brought relief into his mother's face. If only he

would not argue with his father! She put her knitting away and rose.

"I must go and write to Adrian," said she, "also, I suppose, to Lady Waveney."

"Lord, how she will lap it up," Hugh chuckled—
"Move my chair into the shade again, mum, will you?"

She complied, shaking her head at him. "You do feel stronger today, old son, don't you?" she asked fondly.

"I feel strong enough to write myself to Adrian and urge him to get a divorce," answered Hugh flippantly. "It was never in the bargain that Leila should be a peeress."

Lady Easterly disappeared into the house and Janey, murmuring something about a letter, followed. Sir Thomas put on his glasses and reopened the paper. Sydney, from her chair, watched the gyrating swallows with idle intentness. . . . After all, this title was just another door shut between them, making it easier for her to stay on the outside of any career that he would have in future. She repeated Hugh's phrase "the back-shelf." Perhaps Adrian was tired and the back-shelf appealed. . . . Perhaps. . . .

"If you are ready, Miss Lea, I should like to get those letters off by this post," came Sir Thomas's voice and Sydney rose obediently.

Her stay at Easterly Park lasted a week and brought certain other aspects of the changed country life before her eyes. Not that these changes were very observable there, since Sir Thomas was a rich man and his house was neither an old nor an inconveniently large one. Except in the matter of luxuries, therefore, flowers and hot houses and so forth, things at Easterly were much as usual. But when Janey took her off on a bicycle into the surrounding country,

then Sydney saw how the stately and ordered existence which had been for centuries the envy of the world, was passing, had passed. The great houses, in vast parks, stood untenanted, save where the Red Cross floated over them and men in blue bands limped about the weedy gardens, or up and down the mossy terraces. Cattle and sheep browsed unre-buked on the very lawns, while an aristocratic white peacock raised a shrill protest. Trees lay where they fell, walls lay where they fell, gardens remained weed-grown, unplanted. Within doors, in a few rooms, some grey-haired straight-backed, splendid woman, fetched and carried, and worked, in frocks which a few years ago her own cook would have dis-dained. One afternoon, the two girls turned their bicycles between a pair of high ornamental iron gates and pedalled smoothly along an avenue which to Sydney seemed, in a vaguely painful way, to be fami-iliar. Suddenly, they came upon a house, which stretched out long wings into white arcaded terraces with tall vases on them. The vases overflowed with scarlet geraniums—and Sydney felt for an instant as though her heart had stopped beating.

They alighted from their bicycles and sat by the roadside; Janey was a little concerned at her companion's white face. Sydney looked long, long at the house, and the arcaded terraces and at the vases which seemed to be filled with blood. Then they remounted their bicycles and rode home, Janey quite triumphant that after all Miss Lea had affirmed of an American summer, yet she should be so plainly feeling the heat.

That afternoon was however unusually "close and stuffy" as Lady Easterly said; and Hugh felt it very much. He had been irritable, excited and argumen-tative all day, and his mother finally felt it best to

leave him alone in his chair, where Sydney from her window, as she was changing her dress, saw him. Something in his weary attitude and restless movements filled her with pity. Poor lad, was he maimed and paralyzed in soul? Was there nothing one could do?

A few minutes later she was standing by his side, a violin case in her hand. Hugh opened his eyes fretfully and they did not brighten when he saw who it was.

"I wondered," Sydney asked holding out that violin-case, "if this was yours?"

A faint interest came into the boy's eyes.

"That's mine right enough," he said, not very pleasantly, "where did you get it?"

"It was in the cupboard of my room. I wondered if you'd mind," she went on briskly, "showing me something about the E-string—I began to fiddle a little some years ago, but I will have forgotten it all by now."

Half an hour later, Lady Easterly heard the faint, familiar sound of one of Hugh's favorite airs, and looked out in surprise. He sat alone in his wheeled chair and his head was bent happily over the violin. When she joined him, a little later, she saw with relief that his face was full of peace.

"Where did you find your fiddle, dear boy?" she asked. "I had forgotten it."

"Oh, Miss Lea found it somewhere and brought it out here to ask me something.—Look here, mum," he suggested, "couldn't you get me that teacher who used to be at St. Albans? I believe I'd take it up again a bit. It would be something to do."

"No doubt I could—I'll find out at once—that is if you think you are strong enough—" she answered gratified.

"Oh well, if I'm not, as Miss Lea said, I can stop whenever I like," replied Hugh tranquilly while his bow drew out long and comforting harmonies. "I'll not be so cross if I have something to do, mum," he told his mother, and she assented.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ROMEYNE remained in France and Switzerland for nearly a month. He was very busy; he went from Paris to Tours and from Tours to Berne; his tasks took him as far as possible from the Front and yet it seemed to him as if the roaring of the guns was never out of his ears. In his talks with this man and with that, he became constantly called upon to deal with the situation created by an apparent military deadlock and by a series of diplomatic entanglements, complex beyond precedent. At these he laboured, not without result, but all the while his mind remained cool, untouched, and not very hopeful. His judgment retained its clarity; and on the long journey homeward his generalizations and deductions followed one another with their usual accuracy and force. Sitting in the slow, French train, with his cigar, his eyes following mechanically the stiff rows of poplars and the never ending line of camps, his mind gave steady consideration to the vital problems confronting his own country in its passage toward bureaucracy; while his power of reflection—so rare during those hectic days of the Somme—enabled him to look forward as well as back.

The English system, superb in its capacity for the slow building of empire, had never been well fitted to cope suddenly with such a crisis, involving its very existence. What had been in the first months of the War the desperate struggle of a few individuals to handle the Day of Judgment, had, by 1916, developed into an equally desperate struggle to prevent all action from being stifled by the sheer numbers of

people required to perform it. That small heroic band of civilian men and women, who from August to December 1914, had, by the sheer, dogged persistency of their effort, acted as barriers against the crushing weight of disaster—was no longer there. By their sacrifices they had created energy and system out of chaos; they had accomplished the impossible as England has so often accomplished it. From their single effort had sprung those Committees and sub-Committees—a pullulating mass of the untrained, who could not make up in zeal what they lacked in intelligence. To Romeyne's mind the body politic seemed to lie like some huge giant, bound by pygmies, and buried under a steadily drifting accumulation of data. From beneath an immense heap of records, forms and requisitions, the giant made occasional spasmodic convulsions, which resulted in action; but usually he lay inert, his movements but faintly discerned, if discerned at all. At this spectacle the Nation gazed, respectful if depressed, while only the Army and "Punch" showed impatience. The general effect of such bureaucratic complexity and multiplication of powers was to bewilder the well intentioned and furnish the incompetent with fresh justification for their incompetency. No man could possibly know all the people who were in all the other departments, and some took pride in not knowing, in trying to run what was essentially a cooperative business without any attempt at cooperation.

At this point in his reflections Romeyne sighed:—but the difficulties remained in his mind, so that when he lunched, the day after his return with his friend Easterly at the Club—, he gave that further form and expansion to his ideas which is always to be gained from a contact with a sympathetic listener. Leaning back in his chair he discussed, in measured

terms as his way was, the new aspect which his journey lent to things at hand.

"The Government?" he said, in answer to his friend's question—"Oh, so far as I can see they are sliding to dissolution down the slope of their own indecisions. . . . You know how it has been.

. . . When in doubt create a new Department: and each one of these Departments seems to contradict and interfere with the operation of some other.

. . . There's a Ministry of Information to acquire knowledge and to withhold it from the Ministry of Propaganda, who were created to make use of it.

. . . There's a Department to stimulate Food Production and a Department to regulate prices, so as to prevent that stimulus from taking effect. You think I am exaggerating? By no means! There's the Committee to induce the Public to invest in War Bonds, and the counter-Committee on Taxation, which is careful to see that the Public shall have no money to invest! You have seen it in action."

"I have indeed," assented Sir Thomas ruefully; and Romeyne, half like a man talking to himself, continued to analyze the situation.

"Besides the automatic check which these Departments tend to impose, the one upon the other, there has grown up an indefinite hostility between them.

. . . At dinner at the Welden's, the week before I left for France—*she* said that England reminded her of a house where the cook will not speak to the butler and the housemaids are at loggerheads . . . because if one Department grants a permit for any purpose, then the next Department will immediately revoke that permit, if only to demonstrate its own importance!"

"Very acute, Lady Welden always is—but rather too critical for these times, in my opinion," said Sir Thomas.

"She had my sympathy—she had my sympathy," rejoined Romeyne, with more personal earnestness and less aloofness than was his habit. "You see, Easterly,—there are dangers which you fellows in the House fail to realize. Procedure has become complicated just when it ought to have been simplified. You have no idea how the City feels it—how the manufacturer feels it, how the whole question of raw materials, of munitions, is hampered by it. For example," he settled himself deeper into his chair—"this is what I heard yesterday at Storey's Gate. If the High Explosive Department needs to purchase some raw material, from the States, let us say; first, its experts must convince the Ministry of Munitions and the War Department of the necessity, then the censorship must be argued with in order that the cables concerning this transaction should not be dropped into the waste-paper basket as being the machination of an unscrupulous neutral! If an agent be sent over to complete the purchase, his credentials cannot be too elaborately worded or he will be held up on landing while the Alien Officer and the Port Officer discuss whether a letter declaring that he *may* land, means that he *should* land. Weeks pass: the stuff is ready to be shipped—if the Ministry of Shipping can be persuaded to grant a permit—and finally, when it arrives the War Trade Department is so terrified by its scientific name, that it is promptly refused admittance to the country! Meanwhile, . . . the German guns are shooting it—or something better still for the purpose—at Middleton, in France."

"This is appalling," said Sir Thomas and Romeyne shrugged assent.

"That's why I am going to take a rest in Scotland," he remarked, "but I had to have my grumble out first."

"If we go on like that, we shall lose the War."

"That is not a possible phrase for England, my dear chap. Every man at the head of these multifarious monuments of bureaucratic red-tape has, like yourself, a son at the Front—or a son who will not return from the Front. With all our faults of system, there is no forgetting the fact, and where I have been on the Continent I was still more struck with the force of our invaluable national lack of imagination. When the French and Italian nerves are quivering with the possibilities of German success—we thank God! never admit it. . . . But must you be off?"

"I've just time to catch my train I fear. Miss Lea broke down a month ago and I've been carrying on without anyone—she's back again and is to arrive at Easterly today—so I've much work."

"Ah?" said Adrian vaguely; and bade his friend farewell. He sat for a few moments after Easterly's departure, preoccupied with the effort to close again the door of his consciousness—which a name had opened. That power of will, which enabled him to live, as he put it, in water-tight compartments, had never been more valuable. In these days he managed to inhabit with comfort only the office part of him—to exist wholly in that bare, cold, business-like apartment of his official position, with its rather depressing outlook. Another door, into the richer quarters of life, must be kept shut at all hazards.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SYDNEY returned to London after the week at Easterly Park with steadiness regained. The incident which had meant so much in her life seemed closed, yet she had the feeling that this was only seeming: the future would determine. Such service as she had rendered to the Empire is not one that can be recognized; she had joined for that brief space a band of heroes who toil in darkness and are never thanked; and the hand-clasp which Sir Thomas gave her, with a few mumbled words, was more than most of them receive. Sometimes she wondered half-whimsically, half-bitterly, what he would have thought had he known all! Her reward lay in a sense of his complete confidence in her work, in the increased dignity of her position, and the knowledge that in a crisis, so much had depended upon her. For the rest, the affair could not be talked of, she must hear in silence the vague gossip, the rumours, which clung about the political downfall of a great family, whose tragedy she had witnessed; whose pain was bound up with her own.

She was very much alone that autumn. Sir Thomas did not come up every day and Miss Violand was making her September visits in Yorkshire. The Pember Chynes and Cairds too, were out of town. There was no lack of work, but she could do it at her own hours. Thus she had more leisure to note the changes that were taking place in the world around her.

By the autumn of 1916, the War had settled upon London like some monstrous growth, spread in all directions, affecting all districts; swallowing up

vast blocks of building; choking the dry bed of the lake in St. James' Park with a fungus of concrete offices; covering the turf of squares with huts; devouring overnight whole rows of private houses; breaking down the economic tissues of trade and absorbing its vitality; turning that city of eight million inhabitants into one single factory and that factory but one of a thousand such factories, in the most gigantic business enterprise that the world has ever known. For the first years, the streets had retained their look of solid power and of immutable wealth—their air of indescribable permanency, which is London's pride, and though the current that poured through them had changed its tint to khaki brown, there seemed to be no lessening in volume. Then the lights began to be withdrawn; after the first raids, the town became at dusk a place of mysterious blue darkness pierced with dimmed taxi-lamps; a cloud of hurrying shadows, lit only by the bewildered stars or by the guardian search-light, like a sword in the hand of an arch-angel. About this time, especially in the Parks, appeared the hospital blue, always recalling the hue of the Madonna's robe in some primitive Italian painting. Next, the uniformity, the stolidity of the streets began to give way. For a long time the populace had ceased to notice the woman in uniform, just as they ceased to notice the trained nurse, but now they never even turned to look at the trousered woman. Girls with brown cheeks, short hair, strong straight legs, whirled deftly to the curb huge vans full of precious war supplies and emptied them of their contents. The neat chauffeuse passed by, running a Government car; or the tall girl footman stood by the carriage door, her bright hair coiled under her high cockaded hat.

When the khaki began to diminish on Piccadilly other Allied uniforms replaced its tan—the French

officer, with his pale blue cloth and dashing air; the poilu, small, smiling, soldier-like. Bearded Russians, Serbians, Montenegrins, Italians, wearing their graceful grey-green cloaks, filled War Department cars or jostled privates in uniform, among the crowds. Colonial troops were everywhere; huge Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, marked with harlequin spots of colour—sprawled on the grass in company with young women, wearing white boots. Ambulances, motor-lorries, motor-bicycles, tore up Park Lane. The royal equipages passed by, carrying the wounded for an outing or bearing the King, the Queen, or the Queen mother, to the conscientious performance of their duties in hospitals and camps. The crowd, seemingly apathetic to this spectacle, looked dully on Royalty, but was roused to interest by foreign notabilities. The native Indian chieftains, who wore their khaki with a difference, were always sure of a gallery; and there a group invariably gathered to watch Sir Pertab Singh—that splendid warrior—as he cantered his chestnut in the Row, his turban end streaming in the wind.

All this formed a pageant in variety seldom equalled and in size surely never surpassed in history. Special occasions called forth special colour; flags fluttered overhead; women in brilliant dress sold trinkets on the pavement. If at first sight this seemed a pageant of empire, of rejoicing even, one had but to move in the crowd, to note their expression of restless excitement and to see how strain or loss had darkened their eyes with its purple shadow. Like the pageantry of the New England hillsides in autumn, marking the passage of the year—this too, was a pageantry of change and death, and in the shifting crowds, like blown leaves, as in their blaze of colour, one marked the end of an era, the passing of a world.

Then the sky began to change. . . . To

Sydney this change seemed the most awful, the most significant of all. That man's rage should challenge and defile the very face of heaven, the divinity which, for unnumbered centuries had bent above him its eternal peace, which his curses had never moved, which his prayers had never reached, which had been the very symbol of inaccessible immutability. Now it had become the animated and terrible medium of death, full of malign activities. Against the crescent moon, that sinister goddess, women drew the blinds with a shudder, holding their children close lest her rays, falling on them, should cast on them her ancient spell. Men, who in all their trials had lifted up hearts and eyes to heaven, now cowered under its mysterious betrayal.

The sky filled with strange movement. . . . From the first months of War, aeroplanes had filled the summer days with their ceaseless humming. Each morning now, two or three, great, round observation balloons drifted over London from south to north, gilded by the sunshine into delicate, fantastic bubbles. A dirigible, a long, sinister, silvery thing with clattering engines, dodged among the chimney-pots. Always on the horizon, four or five sausage balloons hung at the oddest angles, while now and again in some remote quarter of the Park, one came upon them at rest in their lairs, two or three perhaps squatting thereon, like big, tan-coloured elephants, quiet in sleep. . . . Did one for a space forget these things, one was sure to come upon high fences and patrolling sentries, guarding from view London's defences newly erected against the terror which fieth by night. Vague, distant explosions shook the air, followed by the thin notes of a bugle. . . . This was by day, while at night, there was the ominous darkness. Surely, mankind had lost the sky forever . . . even although it had revealed a new and strange

beauty. One night, Sydney was rewarded by a sight well-nigh miraculous—for she watched the search-lights seeking to and fro for a patrolling aeroplane—. When their rays found and enveloped it—there it hung in the heaven, sparkling all over like some golden bee—and she drew breath sharply that such passionate beauty should grow out of evil cruelty.

Her mind, remembering past things, travelled back over the centuries in quest of comparisons—and found them not. Picture after picture might unroll itself—of battle and siege and sack—but these, at the worst, had never lacked the peace of nature. How could man have risen to any achievement, had he not felt the secure heaven stretched over him—beneath which his weakness seemed so natural—which ever remained pure and untouched from his iniquity? The very worst the medieval imagination could do had not defiled the symbolism of the universe, had not changed the music of the spheres to this daily and nightly hum of death. Even Dante had come forth from his dreadful pilgrimage once more to behold the stars. Surely, the primal curse had never till now been fulfilled.

One mild golden afternoon, as she rested awhile on a bench near Stanhope Gate—a van stopped nearby, and three soldiers, alighting, began to release some flocks of carrier-pigeons. The birds were confined in shallow baskets and when these were opened, their occupants crowded to the edge, paused, pecking and glancing, then spread their wings, rose. The flock circled about as if seeking some mysterious trail and moved with one accord now soaring up into the sunlight and above the trees, now swooping down almost on the heads of the crowd. Always each time it rose a little higher, a little further into the sky, beyond the roofs. Then the instant came when instinct took the helm—the entire flock, as one bird,

wheeled, darted, disappeared. . . . Sydney liked to think of the gallant creatures, soaring straight-away across the fields and woods, stayed neither by gun-fire, nor foul, factory smoke, nor poison gases,—“unhasting, unresting”— swift to their home.

She questioned the soldiers in charge, who told her that these were young birds, not yet fully trained, but given a systematic series of flights, each one longer than the last. When the final flock had flashed away and vanished, she noticed that one bird had been left behind. Bewildered, he had not taken flight with the others, but had turned back into the shelter of the cage. The soldier pulled the young bird out and held it kindly, soothing it, stroking its wings. “E’s just a bit afryde,” said the boy grinning, “but e’s a fine bird, e’ is!”

Such a still, sunny afternoon it was. . . . As Sydney walked slowly homeward, the dull, yellowing leaves drifted down on her head and brought irresistibly before her inner vision the glory of the New England autumn. Dreamily, the pigeons in flight moved through that vision—spreading their wings, darting through the splendid forests—going home. Her heart gave a sudden beat of longing; she seemed to behold the sea and the great westering ships, with their prows turned homeward. . . .

As she came in sight of her own front-door, she saw that there was a woman in uniform standing on the step,—quite an unfamiliar uniform, dark blue with touches of crimson and a soft, jaunty little cap. But was the wearer unfamiliar? Suddenly Sydney gasped, and began to run. She ran wildly down the sedate Mayfair Street and when the uniform turned at her hurrying step—she cried out:

“Oh Bess! Oh Bess!”

It was indeed Elizabeth, smiling, unruffled, competent as of yore, her glance possibly a little more

certain, her mouth even firmer. They held one another like a couple of children; they laughed together; and Elizabeth kept repeating that she hoped her friend liked the surprise. She would have written, of course, but passports were so difficult and uncertain, and sailing a matter of doubt until the very last moment. . . . They went in together—Giddy, much impressed by Elizabeth's uniform, gave her welcome as if she had been an old friend of the family—and they talked and talked together until long after nightfall.

Such a wonderful Elizabeth! Her friend had hardly been prepared for the change by her letters, although these had lately held a note of doubt and even of restlessness. There had been suggestions of a great current moving Elizabeth, with other American youth, in the direction of suffering and those vital tasks which it creates. Sydney recalled sentences of doubt regarding neutrality, regarding one's personal responsibility toward Belgium, toward France—and she remembered feeling glad as she read. But there was nothing doubtful about this Elizabeth—there was rather a fundamental certitude concerning herself, her mission and the whole United States. From the most conscientious of neutrals, Elizabeth had become the most aggressive of pro-Allies. Her mind lived in a large, well-stocked apartment filled with new opinions in packages, and entirely oblivious of any room which it may previously have occupied. She selected these packages and thrust them at you, exactly as she had done with earlier ones, such as the Monroe Doctrine, the ideal of Presidential neutrality and the duty of being too proud to fight. She was now primed with Lord Bryce's report and the *Lusitania* medal; so that Sydney was seized with a wild desire to laugh.

As to France—no words could describe the com-

placency, the affectionate patronage of Elizabeth's attitude toward France. There was nothing apparently in the soul of France concealed from her. It mattered little that her previous estimate of the country was one where disapproval struggled with admiration for a culture of which she understood nothing except its value to certain important minds. All that had now quite vanished, and the suffering of France had given her a claim upon Elizabeth—an actual claim. Elizabeth felt that she understood France—particularly since having passed through it in 1914. She knew all about the beauty of French family life; the custom of the *dot*; the advisability of light wines; and "our obligations to Lafayette." When she spoke of France, her manner was maternal.

She had joined a college unit of the Red Cross, formed three months earlier with a view of engaging in reconstruction work. Just what this plan really involved Elizabeth was not yet clear, but both her abilities and temperament assured her an important place therein, and her absorbed, *affairée* manner testified to the spirit she brought to it. Her soul seemed to have put on uniform as well as her body. After their first greetings, she surveyed her friend with a shade of disappointment and remarked that she had hoped by this time to find Sydney engaged in war work.

"Organization of individuals in the present crisis is really the only thing that counts," said Elizabeth firmly; and again the younger girl was seized with a wild impulse toward laughter. As they sat together, the two years of separation seemed, in a vague way, greatly to have marked the difference between them. Elizabeth, with one neatly gaitered leg over the other, her bronze hair just showing under the cap and her general air of martial efficiency, was far from being the Elizabeth who had fled in 1914 from that outbreak of lunacy known as the Great War. She was

now perfectly in the movement and it was evident that she had expected to find Sydney also in the movement and was puzzled.

"I can't say I think you are looking well, you know," she remarked in a dissatisfied way. "You're rather pale and thin it seems to me."

Sydney brushed this view aside. "I was rather done out in the summer and had to go away and rest," she answered; "but I seem to be all right now."

"You seem to me different somehow," said her friend and studied her in silence. Just exactly wherein the difference lay she found it troublesome to say. Sydney seemed taller, slower in movement, her thin dress was more feminine, her voice was lower in timbre and held unfamiliar notes. Her face was more definite in modelling and the sensitive mouth had developed a certain strength—her glance also seemed to have more reserve and there was a quiet poise about her which Elizabeth felt to be somehow un-American. One felt there had been influences—but what caused them? Age, perhaps—or work? But what could there be in the routine of a private secretary which lent one that air of having lived?

"I never quite understood from your letters just why you left Sister Lucy," Elizabeth said. "I should have thought you would be so much closer to things in the hospital—to the War, I mean."

"Well, there are a great many sides to the War . . . perhaps, if I had been a nurse I should have felt so—but you know I've never had any talent for nursing. And I am useful to Sir Thomas."

"What sort of things do you do for him?" Elizabeth asked curiously. "Write his letters and so on, I suppose?"

"Oh—the usual secretarial work and keeping his appointments and affairs in order; getting up reports for him on Committees, when he can't be there;

and collecting his notes for use in the House," replied Sydney, serenely, and somehow once more Elizabeth felt baffled.

"You like it?"

"Very much: and they're the kindest family in the world."

"Well it seems to me dreadfully hole and corner; and outside of everything," declared Elizabeth. "I think you'd much better join the Unit and come with us to France." She fully expected to have this view met in the old way, by a vehement outpouring of denial and assertion—but Sydney at first remained silent, then when pressed, simply said that she didn't feel that way about it—and changed the subject. They talked almost entirely thereafter about Elizabeth's affairs and prospects—and that consciousness of profound change and reserve, continued present to the elder girl.

The unit remained in London only long enough to obtain the proper permits and during this time they saw each other daily. Elizabeth was very much absorbed in her unit: she was always a community person; one inevitably thought of her somehow as a part of some organization. To be in London, in uniform, a member of that philanthropic crusade which she felt to be the great miracle of the time—this was wonderfully satisfactory to Elizabeth and she was sorely tried by the fact that it seemed to impress her friend so little. The younger girl was troubled by her own lack of frankness—it savored of disloyalty. Yet how was it possible to pluck up all her experiences of the last months and lay them before Elizabeth's inflexible gaze? She knew what her friend's views were, and a contest with emotion which was unremitting—though successful—was not likely to gain much sympathy. Above all she could never have yielded up the chief offender to Eliza-

beth's wrath . . . which would have taken all sorts of forms, drawn from novels. She could imagine her friend's raised eyebrows and positive reprobations and warnings against the immorality of English aristocrats; the idea made her writhe, though all the while she agreed. So she said nothing; she let Elizabeth go without letting her know anything of importance about her own feelings. But she loved her dearly all the while; and she felt desperately the blackness of the day when Elizabeth departed into that cloud of horror, from which came the incessant grinding and roaring of the wheels of War. It was worse, far worse, than their first parting.

CHAPTER XXXV

TEN days later, Elizabeth wrote saying that she was hard at work, that conditions were far worse than she or anyone else, could have dreamed, that the suffering was as far beyond her power to describe as she feared it might be beyond her power to alleviate. Certainly, there was no complacency in that letter, and the one or two following it soon showed that her natural strength and capacity had fully risen to the task. Then fell silence, and, for Sydney, all of life once again became centered in the room at Charles street, in typewriter and telephone, in reports and blue-books, in measures and debates. There was very little that autumn to divert her mind beyond an occasional encounter with some interesting stranger at the Pember Chyne's on Thursday afternoon, or a romp now and then with Edith Caird's babies. An unusually long stretch of golden weather gave way at last to an unremitting drizzle, varied by perpetual fog. These were even welcomed since they brought some relief from the menace of air-raids, one or two of which, that October were severe.

Miss Violand, urged by both Sydney and Giddy, postponed her return to town until the danger from them was lessened. She had not a very strong heart and there was no doubt but that these alarms were harmful to her, all the more because of the dauntless courage which allowed her to make no sign. But her companions noted the blue lips and nervous tremor with disquiet and were decidedly relieved when she finally consented to remain away. Her

conscientiousness took a great deal of argument to combat and Sydney could not help wondering if there were many elderly ladies in her own country who would feel themselves obliged to remain in danger for the reason purely of *noblesse oblige*,—because they did not wish to appear driven away! Miss Violand stiffened her delicate head and observed that she could not leave Sydney and Giddy to face bombardment alone.

“But its bad for you,—and Giddy and I don’t feel it a bit!” the girl urged for the fiftieth time, “it isn’t either as if you had any work to do about it, dear!”

“I have work, Sydney,—to show the enemy how we feel. You know that’s what he is trying to do after all, to frighten us, the civil population, by these attacks. If a person in my position runs away—”

“How can you be running away, Miss Helen, when all the world knows you always used to be spending your autumn in the country, with the rest of the gentry?” Giddy here indignantly interposed. “Before the War, was you ever in London in October, I ask you, mem?” She turned to Sydney, her honest fact flushed, “Wasn’t this always the month for my cleaning and freshening and painting? And now you are going to give the Huns a chance to say they changed all your habits, ay, and your father’s habits and the whole family’s! I don’t know how you can bring yourself to do it, mem!”

“You see how Giddy feels,” Sydney joined in, but Miss Violand only set her lips and shook her head. Fortunately, an appeal to the doctor was not without its effect and his opinion was final. Miss Violand must return to her brother in Yorkshire and that without delay, and from this decision there was no further appeal.

Sydney and Giddy therefore, watched out the raids alone. Sitting quietly together in the darkness, they heard the sinister humming, the crash of the falling bomb. Giddy knitted, her face finely steady, her lips moving in prayer. The younger woman, hot with rage and shaken by excitement, yet drew calmness and strength from this companionship which often in her after life meant "*England*" to her mind, and nothing less. All the while, her imagination played to and fro, touched with wonder. That this should be her life,—the life of millions of people—this incredible horror; "the terror that flyeth by night"; and that men and women alike should meet it with such unconquerable courage! She kept thinking of the people she loved, those at home, then of Elizabeth, of Adrian . . . was he safe? Flashes lit up the little room, outlining against the window the old woman's indomitable head.

November came, Miss Violand returned, Sydney's days became once more still and regular. She had many quiet evenings, reading aloud to her hostess or anxiously discussing ways and means; rising prices and falling comforts; food, fuel, clothes and such details. Life kept steadily growing more expensive, more restricted within the sheer limits of the possible. How were they best to meet this? Forgotten economies of an hundred years ago became in daily use. Miss Violand took to making paper spills to replace matches for the coming winter; she turned each envelope inside out and used it twice. When she and Sydney dined alone, they kept a bare table and used napkins made of paper. Although omnibuses were scarce, and the women who conducted them were rough, yet no taxi could be used unless it were question of a journey.

Fires became a problem; so they shut up the

drawing-room and sat in the dining-room. The char-woman who had been Giddy's assistant, be-took herself off and the old servant did her work alone. This, she assured her mistress, was no hardship, but there were other changes that upset her more. She used to return from her marketing with her mouth pursed into a grim line, and her skirts,—no longer stiffly starched,—bristling with indignation. The price of food was "just a fair outrage." In Giddy's opinion this was all the fault of "they profiteers" and she had no manner of use for the present Government. "Indeed, I wonder, mem," was her invariable conclusion, "whatever we will be coming to?" And "I wonder too, Giddy" her mistress would echo with a sigh. At desperate moments—such as when finding eggs 6/6 a dozen, Giddy would not hesitate to prophesy revolution.

In December, the Government fell. Sir Thomas had never ceased being a Conservative but he was a Conservative with a difference, and he had felt the weakness of the existing Coalition to have been worse than the weakness of Asquith. Tory though he was, he had one very strong bond of sympathy with Mr. Lloyd George. Both of them were bent on winning the War. Therefore like some other Conservatives, Sir Thomas Easterly drew a long breath, shut his eyes, swallowed hard, shut the door of his mind on certain inconvenient recollections, and set himself to work to support the new régime with all the strength that lay in him. Change of Government brought change of tasks, both to him and to his friend, Lord Waveney. The latter, in particular, was increasingly occupied and therefore no longer able—so he said—to drop in of evenings for long talks in Easterly's study. He was over-worked, he declared; everybody was over-worked—except the thousands of workmen who did the least possible labour for the

shortest possible hours and preferred striking to standing by the Nation and their necessary tasks.

Just after Christmas, there reached Sydney a long letter from Harry Ashburnham, a letter written in some remote district of southern Russia and forwarded to her, thus escaping censorship, in the Embassy bag. It was a brilliant account and characteristically gave an analysis of the whole situation, political and military, which presupposed in the recipient a fair knowledge of the subject. She noted too, with a smile, that he suggested two or three books for her immediate reading—such as Alexinsky's "Russia in Europe"—Tchekov's Comedies and certain works by Stephen Graham. As a postscript, he put these words: "I am adding some sheets which are wholly separate from this letter, but which I wish you to read carefully and give yourself, personally, to Romeyne. They contain observations on the trend of events here. There is no use in my sending to the W. O. or to the F. O.—to be snowed under on their desks. I prefer not to do so. Although it may be indiscreet to address myself to Romeyne—yet he is the only one of them who knows anything. Moreover he likes you—he will be inclined to favour me on your account. I hope I am not a bother, but I know he comes in often. . . . "

What he enclosed was a close and succinct report of a situation, which even Sydney could not read without realizing its significance. Evidently, English opinion had been wholly misinformed, since Ashburnham was so plainly convinced, not only of the imminence of Russian revolution—but also, what was yet more vital to the Allied cause—of the imminence of separate peace. His analysis of the Russian character showed how its Slavonic dreaminess and fundamental mysticism had made the necessary war-dis-

cipline difficult—while maintaining all military effort under an increasing strain.

Then followed a narrative of the writer's journey from the Caucasus to the Urals, and beyond, into Siberia, for the purpose of ascertaining the attitude of these outlying peoples in event of Revolution. Ashburnham felt that the people whose country lay along the Don River might have a greater steadfastness and vigour than he had been able to find in the rest of Russia. The result of his travels was to confirm his opinion that the future lay here. Even now, he believed, it was not too late for a concerted Allied policy to control the situation for the present and to guide its future. When the revolution did come, Siberia would certainly hold a stable government, and, federated with the tribes of the Don Valley, form a great, new Nation, which should have every reason to ally itself with the Entente. A bulwark might be built against German influence, which outlasting the present War, would transform, in time, the face of Asia.

Upon the details of how best this dream was to be realized, Sydney did not linger. She noted with pride that they assumed for himself a task nothing less than heroic. This was like Ashburnham, and thus he fulfilled himself in her eyes, demanding for his scheme, wide imagination in the conception and tireless energy in the execution. One beheld him linked to a long line of men who have carried their torch into the far corners of the earth—Clive, Cecil Rhodes, or even, tremendous in failure, Gordon. Under the breath of this inspiration, the secretary forgot that the payment England most often exacts of her empire-builders is that of disinheritance. Personal repudiation, personal failure even, have been the most common reward of all those men from

Columbus to Gordon whose task has been to remould the world nearer to the heart's desire.

Naturally, Sydney was not insensible to the compliment of such a letter. In Ashburnham's eyes she was evidently a mind to aid, a personality to consider,—someone who counted, someone who distinctly counted. In these years she had learned, she had thought, she had lived. She found that her mind played about the contents of his narrative, with flexible criticism and comparison, even with a touch of philosophy.

Was this letter, she meditated, to prove in future, just another expression of that eternal conflict between the English genius and the English character,—such as she had already encountered in the case of Ernest Liston? Was she again to see individual initiative fighting bureaucratic inertia? Would the "mandarins" believe Ashburnham?

She spoke to Sir Thomas.

"What is your feeling, Sir Thomas, about the Russian situation?"

"About Russia? The reports are,—certainly not satisfactory, but I'm inclined to think them too pessimistic."

Sir Thomas did not think it necessary to tell his secretary that the Government policy in regard to Russia had been exactly as shifting, stupid and muddle-headed as it had been in regard to some other countries which he could name. He was not proud of it; and moreover, he had grown a little cautious of exposing the defects of the bureaucracy to the clear, uncompromising and rather intolerant young woman, whose mental grasp frequently amazed him. Youth has often such an inconvenient habit of simplifying a problem, causing questions of expediency to show up in an uglier light. . . . The Russian situation called for a firmness and faith which the Foreign

office altogether lacked. Therefore, tapping his eye-glasses reflectively upon his finger-tips, Sir Thomas delivered a little lecture upon the need of a conservative foreign policy and the danger of taking too exclusively the military point of view. Soldiers were apt to rely on action, and thus lead the country into trouble and expense. Sir Thomas had, it is needless to say, perfectly recognized the handwriting of the closely-written sheets lying on Miss Lea's desk. Miss Lea listened with even more than her usual close attention to his remarks, but later in the day, on his way to the Carlton Club, Sir Thomas wondered that she did not mention this document and its contents.

CHAPTER XXXVI

So completely was she carried away on the current of Ashburnham's enthusiasm, so absorbed by his ideas and the possibilities they evoked—that it was some hours before she began to realize what it was he asked her to do. . . . How, after what had taken place, could she seek out Romeyne? The mere thought sent a stir along her nerves, reviving all that miserable restlessness and disquiet which she had begun to calm. Yet to refuse Ashburnham outright was to stifle his plan unheard. Sydney went out and walked the streets, moving in the crowd as among shadows and recalling how much she owed to Ashburnham's comradeship, to his colourful nature, to his dauntless and spirited attitude toward life. After all, the other page was ended; neither of them wished to turn back to it. She returned to the office and wrote:—

“Dear Lord Waveney:

“A letter has come today from Colonel Ashburnham, with an enclosure which he asks me to give you personally, since it contains information of great importance for your private reading. No doubt he will be satisfied if Mr. Parker were to deliver it to you; so that I have it here ready sealed for him whenever he calls.

“Yours very sincerely,
“Sydney Lea.”

Waveney came on the following afternoon. She heard his voice at the front door. “Yes, I know—I shall come in and speak to Miss Lea, for a minute.”

There was a hurried interchange between them . . . both speaking at once.

"I came as soon as I received your note." . . .

"I had hardly expected it would reach you so quickly. . . ."

Then silence . . . no expression of any kind showed itself on the man's face; the woman standing, above her typewriter looked very tall and white.

. . . She handed him the letter and then seated herself at her desk while he read it to the end. The concentration of his attention gave her a renewed sense of security—the buffeting of her pulses ceased.

"What an imagination the fellow has!" he murmured, turning the last page. "I wonder, now—I wonder, if he is right?"

"I feel sure he is!"

"You would—you would, of course—" he paused walked to the fireplace and sat down on the fender, while he continued.

"Just at the moment, I am out of touch with the mandarins on this question. There has been other work to do. I have been twice in France—then, on account of my wife's illness—I have had to be in Bournemouth. So it has been a broken autumn, altogether, and I am out of touch. I must talk to Cecil—yes, I must talk to Cecil,—and then there is 'Miche—Miche'—he ought to know something—."

Her grave eyes lightened with a smile to hear him use, as of old, the pet name of the Grand Duke Michael of Russia.

"Surely," she ventured, "you will support him?"

"Who?" quickly, "the *beau-sabreur*?" Ah, that depends, I am not a Menzies y'see—I never push a lost cause."

"I never classed you with General Menzies for an instant! . . . But is this a lost cause?" she

spoke with fire. "When one thinks what is at stake—!"

"He has more confidence than I in the result. Moreover—I have none in the ability of the present mandarins. We're a slow and blundering nation and our genius—if any—seems to lie in the forlorn hope. If all Ashburnham predicts comes true and Russia goes out of the War—then we may be able by some miracle of doggedness to save ourselves and France. That would be like us. But—prevent the misfortune by the exercise of intelligent foresight and so on—? No!"

Her tone became as ironical as his own.

"Then you believe only in muddling through?"

"Not exactly—" he turned toward her for the first time and spoke with more animation, tapping his emphasis on the fender's edge with a long forefinger. "But it *is* true that we rise to our full power only when things go against us—only then do we co-ordinate, *act*. Over and over again, I have seen this happen—and in it lies all my hope for the future. We shall beat the Germans—but only because they will come near to beating us. Every time they make a fresh move—the Zeppelins, the gas, the submarine—they rouse anew that force of resistance. Their weakness lies in their logic; they reason: 'If we terrify them sufficiently, they will lay down their arms.' And we, illogically, never see it that way. If they could leave us alone—well, you know I have always felt that we carry the seeds of disintegration within us, and we are naturally a pacific people. But to get back to Ashburnham. What would you do?"

She smiled a little at the question, but his face was wholly serious.

"I think," Sydney said slowly, "that first, I should go quietly about finding out what the real current of opinion in the government was on the subject and then

as they probably have no policy, for they rarely have, on any Eastern question, so far as I can see,—I should set to work to form one for them. You have done that before. . . . ”

“Oh, have I?”

She disregarded his interjection. “And you can do it here, because this Government is a new broom. There are the newspapers—Lord Northcliffe will do a great deal for you, if you wish, you know—and of course, one would have to find out how opinion goes in France—what Lord Bertie thinks. You might send Parker to Sir George Buchanan.”

He almost laughed. “I might. And then?”

She turned over the sheets which he had laid back on her desk.

“Then there is the military program. . . . That would have to be determined . . . and surely the War Office could find for you some men who speak Russian? But you are laughing at me—.”

“No!” he answered with vehemence—“on the contrary—you have my admiration. It doesn’t matter that your ideas are not immediately practicable—the point is that you *have* ideas. It is wonderful—you have my admiration. . . . And you have forecast my plan of campaign exactly—if.”

“If?”

“If I saw any hope in Ashburnham’s scheme.”

“Then you see no hope in it?”

“It takes reflection,” Adrian repeated, rising. “I wonder what the Germans are doing there by the way—does he mention it?”

“Much the same thing, but more energetically than England;—and they are playing for the revolution.”

“Well, one must wait and see how it turns out.”

“I confess,” said Sydney steadily, “that I am disappointed.”

“In me—you mean?”

"I think—in you."

"You expected me, I suppose, to catch fire from your friend's letter?"

"I did not expect you to be cold and doubtful—to be on the side of Wait and See."

"Perhaps," he remarked in his quite unruffled voice, "it may be for the best that you should see me as I am."

She hastily turned the conversation away from the personal to the general.

"I should have thought that by this time—after more than two years—England would be tired of muddle and willing to use foresight. Antwerp, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Roumania—what an indictment—what a list of failures!"

He made a gesture, but it was evident that the independence of her judgment was a new sensation to him, and their eyes met, for the first time—challenging, as strangers.

"Turn your mind then," he said, "and consider the German successes. . . . Belgium's conquest raised the moral protest of the whole world—an immense force, let me tell you! The submarine warfare will bring down upon the Kaiser's head the gigantic weight of your country, of the United States. . . . Believe me—there is no failure like a German success and there is no success like an English failure."

"Lord Waveney—that is an epigram."

"You always stimulate me," he rejoined,—then with a change of tone—"Don't let us misunderstand one another, you and I. I have not condemned Ashburnham's scheme off-hand. I shall go over his letter on the lines you so admirably indicated a minute ago. . . . I shall think about it. Will that satisfy you?"

"Of course."

"You admire and like Ashburnham, do you not?"

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"Very much—but that has nothing to do with it—?"

"I am not so sure. I shall do my best for him, for you both." He moved to the door of the room and paused there, looking at her as he held the knob in his hand. . . .

"I did not come, you know, to get his letter," he said, quietly—"but I made that an excuse. I wanted to see you again."

Then, without further word, he went out.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE winter dragged on in long, grey weeks. . . . Letters reached Sydney from Elizabeth, short, hasty, horrified, written from nowhere and in the midst of hard work. They filled her friend with restlessness and discontent. Why stay on helping Sir Thomas and contemplating the bureaucratic muddlers, when there were children to be fed, babies to be saved, hope brought to the living and graves digged for the dead? This urge toward a vital task grew strong in her—surely, it would serve to quiet that inner tumult. She hinted as much to her employer, but Sir Thomas looked so horrified and distressed and implored her so earnestly not to give away to unthinking conscientiousness that she had not the heart to insist. After all, perhaps it was true that others could do reconstruction work as well as she. . . .

Ashburnham wrote several times, full, long, intimate letters, opening before her wide prospects and talking simply of large things. . . . Then a time passed; they reached her at longer intervals and, when opened, were found to be full of ominous mutilations. Where was he, that eager soldier? Was he flying over the steppes in a sledge? Or climbing some mountain pass in the very heart of the world? Or bringing courage and order into the lives of strange, helpless, barbarous peoples? Whatever he might be doing, she knew he thought it "perfectly splendid." Sydney found herself missing him very much and eagerly looking for his return. For some weeks she waited feverishly for word as to the fulfilment of his hopes and plans. But Waveney made no sign.

At midwinter came Janey's marriage to Donald Lochiel; one of those hurried characteristic Christmas weddings, planned to take advantage of the young officer's leave. Janey's mother felt a little dazed by the whole thing and the contrast with what should have been—no engagement to speak of, no trousseau, no plans; just a few hurried preparations—no time to think. What could one make of such a nuptial, with its tragic undertone of parting? Lady Easterly's heart ached as her thoughts flew back to her own wedding, with its delightful, leisurely hospitalities and rejoicings—traditions and preparations and congratulations; their dressing the village church with flowers, the household ball, the homecoming—her bridegroom, rosy and radiant beside her in the landau, as they passed under the triumphal arch with "Welcome to the Bride" on it, at the gate of Easterly Park. "Plenteousness and peace" . . . the words repeated themselves over and over to her mind as she bowed her grey head in the dusky little London church—where the candles seemed unable to dissipate the darkness which pressed in from the foggy streets. "Plenteousness and peace"—plenty of food, of money, of land, of honorable tasks, of responsibilities,—and later, of young life in the house—how little had she realized these things! Women of Ada Easterly's class and type are not given to analysis, but she spoke her thoughts to her husband in the car on their way home.

"We did not appreciate what we had, I fear. . . . We took all our blessings far too much as a matter of course. When I looked at Janey—."

She did not finish, and Sir Thomas, his ruddy face a trifle pale, nodded a silent assent.

These thoughts acheingly recurred to Janey's mother during the rest of the day: when she saw the bright haired maidens, her daughter's friends, gath-

ering around Hugh's wheeled chair; or when, that evening, she came upon Weston, blubbering with her head in the clothes cupboard because she could not go as maid with "Miss Jane" on her brief honeymoon. Janey had dispensed with Weston's services since the War began; indeed, Lady Easterly herself had practically dispensed with them, making use of Weston as buyer to her work-party and knitter in general to the mine-sweepers on the North Sea—and nobody took maids on their honeymoons nowadays—but still! Weston's mistress dismissed her to her bed, in that dignified and final manner which left no opening for lamentation; but Weston was right, when she said that "Her Ladyship felt it, felt the difference as anyone could see." Her Ladyship felt it and Sir Thomas felt it, but being what they were they said nothing further to each other. After the sacrifice of Tom's life and the sacrifice of Hugh's health—what was the sacrifice of Janey's wedding? After all, they both came to feel that it was much to have Janey back again in her old room—poor Janey, with only a new name, a new ring and the memory of a rainy week at Bournemouth, to remind her of her changed estate. However, she was radiant, very busy with her war-work and her letters and docile as of old.

Sydney took a great interest in the wedding and gave herself and her help freely. She had carefully studied the bridegroom, a very solemn, very simple Scottish boy, with a mind as childishly direct and little cultivated as that of his bride, and he filled her modern eyes with amazement. There was in Donald's philosophy the simplest belief in things as they are and a total absence of ambition. If heaven spared his life it was not hard to see just what would be after the War; a careful, well-regulated outdoors existence, for a large part of the year, in a bleak and remote part of Scotland, and an economical holiday in

town in the Spring. It would all be arranged, orderly, planned out, to an unheard-of degree and Janey's life would be the same. Incidentally, Janey's son, if she had one, was practically certain to inherit a property improved by care and foresight. This estimate comprised really all that one could say of Janey's husband.

"Would you like to see our friend Waveney take his seat in the Lords' tomorrow afternoon, Miss Lea?"

"I—Sir Thomas?"

The question startled Sydney; a rare colour came into her face.

"Why not? The ceremony is picturesque, a bit of delightful medievalism. It will be certain to interest you. I can easily arrange for you to see it if you like," observed Sir Thomas, kindly, from behind *The Times*, and the level unconsciousness in his tone brought reassurance to the girl. Of course she would go.

"I should be exceedingly glad to see it," she replied truthfully.

... Why was it that everything connected with the life of Adrian Romeyne should savor of unreality to her mind—always excepting the few times they had been together? Why was he so distant, while so near? She could not discuss the feeling that his personality in the world—of which she caught these echoes and glimpses—was an illusion. The man she loved, and in whose eyes she had read love, seemed to have been created on that instant—this other man had wholly alien traditions, surroundings, education—the one was poignantly real and close to her—the other was like an admired figure in a book. Better close the book and put it away on the shelf, rather than continue to dream over the page.

Sydney had been to Parliament Buildings before;

at her last visit, the Lords had been crowded for an important debate. Now, the Chamber was all but empty, throwing into relief for this reason, the warm tone of the oak, the gilding, the crimson benches, the lights, the embroidered canopy of the throne. . . . A number of ladies occupied the galleries: she herself shrank into a sheltered corner. The three central figures on the Woolsack were full of dignity—except that the Lord Chancellor's three-cornered hat seemed to sit awkwardly on his big wig. . . . He was a man with a wooden countenance; but the tall peer who sat at his side with a reddish moustache had a face full of humourous intelligence. . . .

A picturesque bit of ceremonial enough . . . the new peer between his sponsors—Garter King at Arms looking like the most gorgeous knave of hearts conceivable, the risings and bowings and all the rest of it. Waveney looked rather thin and worn; his face seemed bloodless against the massed scarlet of his robes. Sydney kept thinking of the trial scene in "Alice"; but it was plain that everyone else, including the neophyte, took it very seriously. Evidently they wrapped you up rather gorgeously when they laid you away on the back shelf. The procession filed out of the Chamber and from behind her back came the voices of two men,

"Yes, a charmin' fella and all that. . . . Splendid work during the War. . . . *She's* the stumbling-block, I hear, otherwise it might have been a Viscountcy."

"Likely enough to be removed before long, she's very bad, they say. . . ."

"Good thing too—if she's as impossible as some of 'em. With the right marriage he'd make a real thing of it."

"Oh, trust him for that!"

As she passed through the gallery and into the

large entrance hall with its stone floor, there were several Members of Commons standing about in groups—colleagues of Sir Thomas. . . . One bowed to her vaguely. A little newspaperman came up and shook her by the hand. Was that Waveney himself who stepped for an instant into the hall? She was not sure. . . .

The Square and Whitehall were a swirling cloud of blackness—that January blackness, which seems nothing less than an emanation from the pit, and in which all the horrors of attack from the air seemed to be intensified. One thought of the Germans as part of that dreadful night—as rejoicing in it—as turning the age-long picturesqueness of the London dusk into a sinister shield for destruction. Her footfalls sounded in her own ears as she hurried through, past Storey's Gate to the Park. Other footfalls came up behind her and—Waveney, suddenly and solidly resolved out of the fog, fell into step at her side.

"So it *was* you. How odd!"

"Yes it was I. Sir Thomas told me it was an interesting and picturesque ceremonial which I must not miss."

"And did you find it so?"

"I thought your—obsequies—were truly glorious."

"But it is *not* that!" he cried, with a touch of annoyance in his tone. "Other people may think so, if they like—but not you!"

Her spirits had risen to the exhilaration of his presence and there was pure playfulness in her answer.

"Then I will say instead that your new House is commodious: in the best situation in London: it might even be made comfortable with modern improvements, which I believe you could put into it! And certainly the view from its windows is over all the kingdoms of the earth."

"But you think it is my final dwelling—the grave,

just the same?" he questioned, half-responsive to her mood, and half-serious.

"People say so: they say *Requiescat in pace.*"

"Let them wait until I have given them another word: *Resurgam!* Yes, it is delightful to find you like this, particularly when I have bad news for you."

"You mean about Ashburnham?"

"I fear his plan is hardly practicable at present. The situation in Russia is exceedingly confused and his opinion differs from that of many others. Whether or no it is because his idea involves action, which they detest—I find that the powers that be are not at all disposed to take his view. You know, I was not entirely convinced myself."

"I remember."

They were walking through the Park toward the dim, distant line of lights and roar of traffic which defined Piccadilly. The Mall lay behind them, a gulf of blackness, swarming with the small red lamps of the taxicabs, like insects with luminous eyes. His voice was warm and confidential and his coat brushed her dress as they moved together. . . . Sometimes out of the darkness he saw her eyes shine. He had not ever before thought of her as young and merry as now when he saw her smile after the playful words, or heard the vibrant response in her tones. This youth touched him, too, and lightened his spirit. He talked quickly, easily.

"Though *not* wholly convinced, yet I was struck by what you said and I pushed Ashburnham's side whenever and wherever possible; first, because I have confidence in your judgment and then because I saw you wished it."

"You are very good."

Nothing could be more conventionally decorous than her answer; and he had a wild impulse to put his arm about her shoulders and turn her face toward

his to see if there was laughter in her eyes. They moved on a step or two in silence and when he spoke, his manner was as usual.

"By the way, what do you hear from the States? You have seen the news?"

"I hear very little nowadays, but I saw about the break of relations. . . . Ah, if we had only come in a year ago!" He answered her, as Englishmen were answering their American friends all the world over, "But I understand so very well why you could not."

The fog was lightening, had lightened; revealing each more clearly to the other, more clearly also to the passers-by. Once Waveney raised his hat, and with the act, that sense of their being alone vanished. On Piccadilly the traffic was heavy and they must stand for a long moment, waiting their chance to cross; smiling and talking happily together. Was it Destiny that commanded the one motor in all England to draw up at the curb? A face, pale and distorted, thrust itself from the window, caught Sydney's eye and held it; so that in the recognition she drew a frightened breath. Where had she seen that face? Where, but in a grey, terrible dawn, and when it was white, as the pillow it lay on . . . only, then, the gaze fixed upon her had been desperate and pleading, which now was intense with hate.

She stood suddenly frozen, so that Waveney turned and saw. "Steady!" breathed his voice in her ear, for she had plucked him by the arm. Someone in the motor leaned over and pulled down the shade. He guided her steps across the street, and when she could look at him, she saw that he was biting his lip. She asked tremulously;

"But,—I thought they had locked her up?" and he replied unwillingly, "So did I."

Then he went on to speak reassuringly; yet always

conscious, exquisitely conscious, of the memory they held between them, and of her troubled face. The memory, the memory of that night, did it stir her pulses too? His words faltered into silence; and when Sydney spoke, she was the calmer of the two.

"Do you think she recognized us both?"

"Suppose she did, what does it matter?" He spoke with an indifference he was far from feeling. Nothing, as a matter of fact could be more unfortunate than such a contingency, it meant a link supplied he had hoped forever broken. . . . Who else was in the car, he wondered? The father? Or perhaps only a nurse. But of this he said nothing to his companion. A few minutes later they parted, and Waveney betook himself up Bond Street, walking rapidly, with thoughts more disturbed and rebellious than usual. Surely he need not blame himself; he had been kind, even detached; surely, he had atoned for that instant of passion! Yet the keen pleasure of the talk held danger; he had never felt more aware of her mental attraction for him, of their real congeniality. . . . He found himself asking, if the door of release in his life ever opened, . . . whether such a marriage would be foolish after all? It would have the durable foundation of an intellectual comradeship and stimulus, and were such things not worth a little gossip? What had the more wordly-wise union brought him, that he should value its standards? And what woman he knew approached her, in exotic charm?

Yet, it was true, the matter still shaped itself to his mind in the form of a question. . . . And then, there was Ashburnham. . . . He would soon be returning and he had every advantage, for the door was still closed.

The soldier's name brought with it a strong reaction, and Waveney sighed irritably, wearied of the

struggle of these last months. . . . No; it was folly, sheer folly to be thinking of her; and in view of such chances as today's encounter, worse than folly to keep on seeing her. She had done harm enough to his life by upsetting that spiritual equilibrium he had been so proud to keep; she threatened now to do more harm still. If the faintest suggestion reached Lord Beauvray that Adrian had any personal interest in the woman to whom he had entrusted their secret . . . it was not to be thought of. He must resolutely avoid her in the future.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ON a certain afternoon in April, Sir Thomas entered his house on Charles Street with an unwonted alertness of step; and his secretary lifted her head in surprise to hear him call to his wife and daughter in joyful impatience from the staircase.

“Ada! Janey! It is all right: the President has asked for War.”

“Oh Thomas!”

“Yes, yes, he has indeed and unmistakably. . . . I came home to tell you at once. We have been waiting—all of us in a group—at the Carlton Club for the news to come through. . . . Yes, we cheered together when we heard! A splendid address, you must read it carefully.”

“But does he decide it?—I thought—.”

“Congress will vote, of course, but the result is in no doubt. . . . I must write at once to Mid,—you know, I suppose what it means?”

“I hope so; and I am deeply thankful,” said his wife, “because, I have always felt that in case of a separate peace in Russia—.”

“There will not be a separate peace in Russia,” said her husband impatiently, wishing no cloud on his happiness—“you know that the Revolutionists have every cause to hate the enemy as much as ourselves. . . . But this news, today, means certainty—it means we can’t lose, though God knows we’ve tried hard enough!”

“I don’t think you ought to say that, Dad,—with our magnificent men!” put in Janey—her soldier hus-

band never far from her thoughts, and her father smiled.

"Donald and his like were not in my mind Janey, you may be sure. . . . But I am so relieved—after these black months of discouragement! . . . They say conscription will come there at once, and they have millions of men *and* never beaten in any war! Then you know how I have always hoped for close friendship between ourselves and the States—an alliance between us means peace for the whole world."

Sir Thomas spoke with animation and his eyes were alight. "Oh . . . and by the way, my dear—you had best stop at Smith Square this afternoon to enquire. They say she is *very* bad and not at all likely to get well."

"Was Adrian at the Club?"

"No, I have not seen him. Some one else had heard that there was another relapse. Of course she pulled out of that last one in January, and she may out of this. . . . The men at the Club were all saying her death would make a great difference to Adrian."

"Poor soul," sighed Janey, kindly.

"I think it is very remarkable that Adrian has never consoled himself elsewhere," observed Lady Easterly, over her knitting.

"Too busy—" replied her husband shortly, "and I don't think Adrian has ever been interested in women. . . . But of course, a proper marriage would be just the thing to help him on. He never could do anything with her. . . . She always said sharp things to people and was vulgar, otherwise made his pathway difficult. Now I fancy, she is likely to hang on indefinitely—just when all of us would be glad to see her go."

"You are very harsh, I think, Daddy."

"My dear child, why should I pretend any interest in a vulgar woman, who personally never lost an opportunity to be disagreeable to your mother and myself? I am no hypocrite," declared Sir Thomas truthfully; and then turning happily back to the great event of the day—"you will tell Hughie when he comes in, Ada? He will be anxious to hear."

"There is one person we know who will be delighted," said Janey, as her father moved to the drawing-room door—"and that is Miss Lea. She *will* be pleased."

"I am going to tell her now—" said Sir Thomas, and hastened downstairs.

The news did make Sydney happy; evxerything about that day made her happy. She liked Sir Thomas's half-paternal, half-formal words of congratulation. "And I want you to believe Miss Lea, how much we appreciate the fact that you were our first Ally!" She liked the bunch of flowers, which Hugh, dragging weakly along on his crutches, laid on her desk in silent apology for his past sulkiness. She liked the greeting which Smith brought solemnly up from the world below stairs:

"So being as now the States is one of us, as I may say—the 'ole 'ousehold wishes you to know how glad they was!"

She liked the embrace in which Miss Violand enfolded her that evening, when she returned home, and her tremulous "Oh Sydney, my dear—your wonderful President! But then, I always said he would." She even liked Giddy's smiling remark that "It stands to reason the Colonies would never go back on the Empire!" even though it brought to her a fresh realization of the fact that Giddy—with many thousands of her country folk—had forgotten the little unpleasantness of 1776.

Life has so many unfinished pages, one strained

hard to read to the end before Destiny turned them with an inevitable finger. Sydney again felt that the brief flowering of individual experience for her was once more blotted out and lost in the collective experience. Days rushed on; big with possibility, and events vital to her brushed by and were gone, as it were, over the edge of the cataract. The Russian Revolution had brought hope to many people, though not personally to her—after her reading of Ashburnham's letter. As the situation there grew more and more chaotic, she had become anxious, very anxious, about her friend's safety. One letter had reached her from him since the upheaval in March and it bore a closer, a more personal note than his letters hitherto.

“I always think of you,” Ashburnham wrote—“as a type of your country . . . first the watcher, neutral, puzzled—as you must have been back there in Geneva—then led by suffering and your sympathy—to throw yourself into the task to help. And then, roused to all your energy—riding forth, bow in hand ‘conquering and to conquer!’ That, if I read America aright, is what she is going to do—just as it is what in your own way, you have been doing.”

He was wonderful—Ashburnham—in the way he understood. But the page of life on which his name was written was succeeded by long blanks—in which only her imagination could follow him through that welter of anarchy and blood. . . .

There were other pages . . . but the name she loved best to read had not made its appearance thereon for a long time. Lady Waveney was desperately ill, was dying, was better, relapsed, had all but died, had rallied again. . . . Sydney could not help hearing this from the family talk at Charles Street, hearing also the unsympathetic and impatient

comments with which such news would be accompanied. She dreaded the subject, dreading that tumult of the spirit which lay in recalling their happy walk together months ago—the blackness of fog protecting them. Had that poor soul whom they all wished dead—had she suffered from the breach with her husband—was she tasting the bitterness of going out of life unloved? There were moods when Sydney's pity for her was intense, when she longed to hear better hopes—because there came to her own soul flashes of clear foresight—moods in which she realized that there might be a far worse wretchedness of separation in store than that caused by the wife's existence. What would that be in comparison to the bitterness which might come from his deliberately *not* seeking her when he was free to do so?

These personal pages were so blurred, so hurried—to be skimmed hastily, because they appeared to lack reality in these great days. One's consciousness paused only at certain episodes in which it was linked with the rending forces at loose in the world.

The day came—a hot, summer day, when she stood at a window, to see all about her—hanging alike from Parliament Buildings, and from the button hole of a street urchin—her own flag. Below her surged an excited crowd, which agitated special constables strove to keep to the confines of the sidewalk. There rose a noise and clamor of cries and voices—she herself was sunk in a silence which came of hope fulfilled.

From far down the street came a deep growl of cheering—English cheering, so different from the shrill yelp of the American or French. The soldiers, her countrymen, that earnest of the power to come, must have started on their way. She clasped her hands tight together. Strange how at this instant one thought of little things! They floated up to the

surface of her imagination like bubbles and vanished. . . . Memories of the past three years—the journey from Geneva—Paris—the hospital on Great Stanhope Street—Sister Lucy's anxiety about the iodine . . . the Zeppelin raid and Ashburnham guiding her by the elbow through Regent Street—the long motor ride into the country—that horrible, moaning figure on the bed—and the man with the uneasy smile on his lips and murder in his eyes—Elizabeth in uniform standing on the doorstep. Persistently, too, there recurred to her the picture of the frightened pigeon refusing to take flight with the others and the grinning kindly face of the boy who stroked it.

The growling cheers came nearer and nearer. . . . They meant the future, and that was all today that mattered. Strange that on this very morning a cable had reached her from Ashburnham in Stockholm. He was on his way home—and she could look forward to his coming with pure happiness—with more happiness, taking it all in all, than the note from Waveney, giving her the same news and adding in postscript, hastily, as one who writes against his will, that he wished to see her . . . ? How? Where? Why?—She read these words as in a flash, and then quickly folded the note away—trying not to think of it—trying to push its contents out of mind. Odd that one felt these things at all in so vital a moment of emotion. . . .

They were coming now. They were coming up the street—those tall, straight serious men, her countrymen. Her heart went out to them—life lost its individual confines at the sight, to become merged in that deeper and obscurer current whose shifting has well-nigh shaken down civilization. They were America—she was America. The idea which moved her, moved them; the force that was their birthright,

was hers also. Indifferent as her countrymen might be by nature, blind, or narrow, yet one knew them honestly striving toward an ideal ill-defined, and having once tested and rejected it setting up another without loss of time, turning to assume without by-thought gigantic tasks. Today the world beheld them roused in unimaginable strength, setting forth across the earth in their millions, conquering and to conquer,—a pilgrimage of wrath and hope such as no Nation had ever undertaken before. . . .

Would they be in time—those marching men? they must—they must be in time!

She leaned out of the window and cheered and cheered. . . .

THE END





